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FIGHTING FOR SURVIVAL

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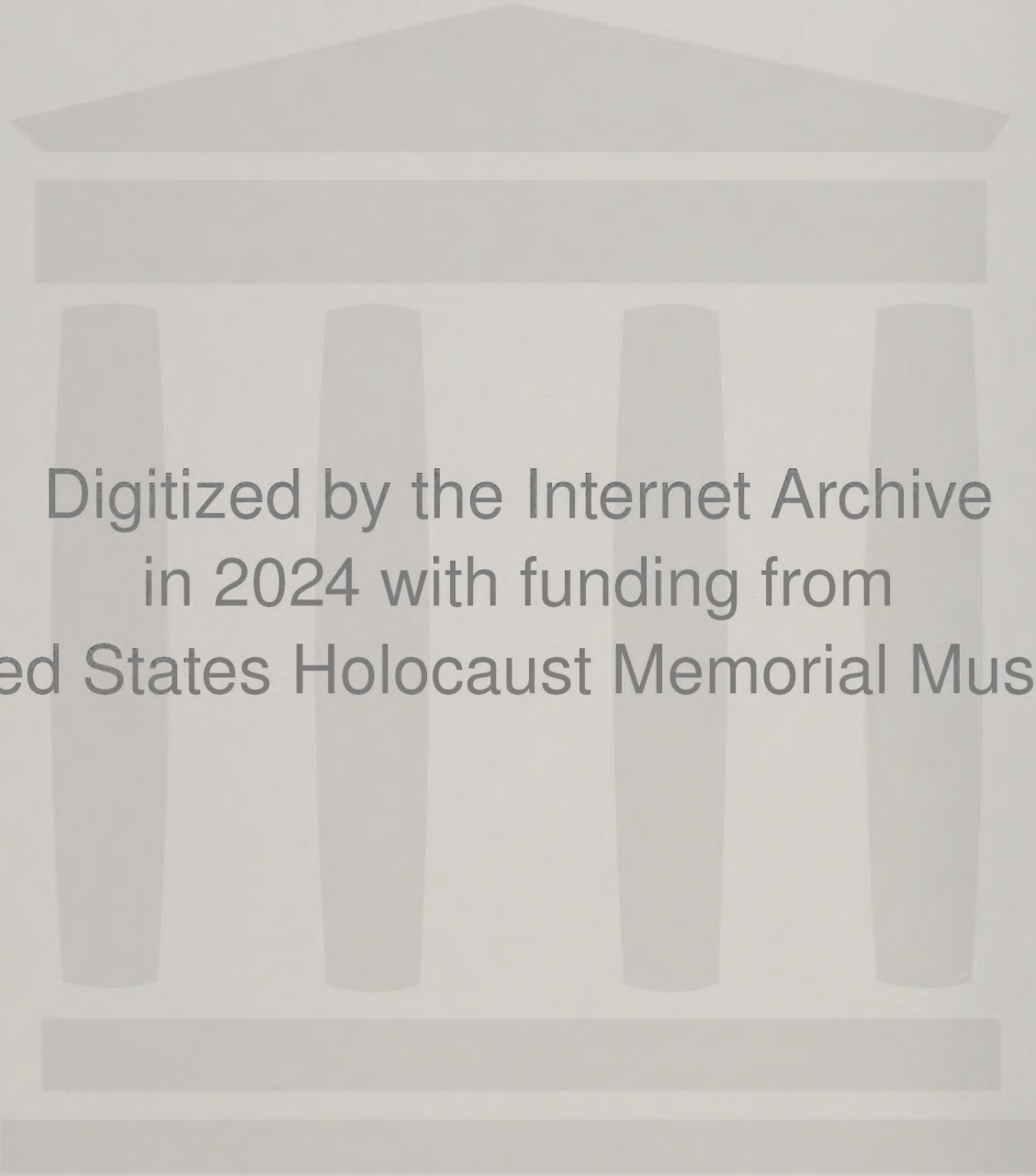
FIGHTING FOR SURVIVAL

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Editor

1999



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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Table of Contents.....	PRE 2
Preface.....	PRE 3
Chapter 1. Flight for Freedom.....	1-1
Chapter 2. Within the Fortified Village.....	2-1
Chapter 3. The Slaughterhouse.....	3-1
Chapter 4. The Children's Home.....	4-1
Chapter 5. A Farm Hand.....	5-1
Chapter 6. In Granny's Care.....	6-1
Chapter 7. Under the Roof of the Sparrows.....	7-1
Chapter 8. Sleeping Above the Pigs.....	8-1
Chapter 9. Through the Eye of the Needle.....	9-1
Chapter 10. Freedom at Last.....	10-1
Post Script.....	POST-1
Epilogue.....	POST-2

PREFACE

"

The realization of this booklet asks for some explanation, I believe. While in the State Prison at Veenhuizen, Holland, I, a 18-year-old Jewish boy born and raised in Vienna, Austria, decided to write down my experiences during the extraordinary year of 1938. With great difficulty, I "organized" some paper and a pencil stub and wrote these notes within a couple of weeks¹ while confined in the Veenhuizen prison. I do not know how the manuscript survived the war and how it went with me through the more than 30 Dutch addresses I lived at after leaving Veenhuizen. But somewhere, in a drawer or a cupboard I saw the paper bundle occasionally, becoming more yellow from year to year, held together by a rubber band. In the last 50 years, until 1987, I have never read what I had written down in 1938 at the age of 18.

"

In the autumn of 1987, an advertisement was published in Dutch newspapers (and as I learned later in the newspapers of many other countries), in which the Mayor of Vienna asked for dairies, notices, and letters with regard to the year 1938. These notices were in anticipation of publications for the commemoration of the 50-year anniversary of the Anschluss². I sent a photocopy of my handwritten,

1

December, 1938 up to January 3, 1939.

2

The joining of Austria with Germany in 1938.

hardly readable diary and received by return mail an enthusiastic letter informing me that mine was exactly the type of contribution the publishers had in mind. Only some weeks later the manuscript was definitely chosen and 10,000 copies were published as a booklet³ at the beginning of March 1988. Besides for book shops, the booklet was intended to be distributed to all high schools in Austria.

Since the diary ends with many unanswered questions, I decided in 1997, nearly 60 years later, to continue placing on paper what happened after Veenhuizen and my experiences during the ensuing years of World War II, most especially how I survived in Nazi occupied Holland.

"

Chapter 1, my original diary of 1938, describes the rapidly changing conditions resulting from the intrusion of Germans into Austria, our decision to flee, the journey itself, and the immediate consequences of the flight. Subsequently, from the beginning of 1939 to VE Day (May 6, 1945) I lived in confinement, in hiding, or with forged identity papers under a false name at various locations in Holland. This diary was written and has been translated into English from original German. Chapter 2 and subsequent chapters describe these experiences at the time until freedom was ensured by the end of World War II. Descriptions of the experiences of these ensuing years are to complement and give closure to the diary of 1938. This latter portion of the book was originally written in Dutch, and has been translated into English.

³ "In die Emigration", copyright by J & V Edition, Vienna, 1988. ISBN 3-85058-020-0.

It is felt that the story should be written for the education and benefit of English-speaking readers everywhere, who should never lose sight of the consequences of governments gone completely astray and out of control. Moreover, this book should be a homage to the soldiers of the Allied Forces, who gave parts or all of their lives to make it possible for us to live in freedom.

December 1998

Erwin H. Kampelmacher

Chapter 1

Flight for Freedom

January 1, 1938

Only two more minutes and a New Year will begin. Aroused and happy at the same time, the people are hurrying over to the Stephanplatz¹ in Vienna. Suddenly, everyone stops and looks at the clock which will shortly show the hour of midnight. I am amongst this mass of people, and, like many others are standing here in this historical place, to celebrate a wonderful evening and the beginning of the New Year. And now the bells are starting to ring very softly and are getting louder and louder; you can hear the ringing through the ice cold of this winter evening. I look into faces which are happy and excited and are thinking of a wonderful New Year. But other faces that I see have a dark look about them and are huddling deeply into their coats. Maybe they do not expect all good may come from the beginning of a New Year. I look up at the clock and then to the heavens. Suddenly, an idea strikes me, and I imagine something that I have seen. I do not know, and I cannot say what it was, but it was something evil. "A bad year," I say to myself. The ringing of the bells is subsiding. The mass of people start to move, masked images are hurrying among the streets. A beggar leans against a wall and shivers. I look at him and I whisper over and over again,

1

The Stephanplatz was and still is the historical meeting place, especially for Viennese youngsters, to gather during New Year's Eve. "Stephen's Square" is a large open area in the center of the town surrounding the Cathedral of Saint Stephen. The bells of the Cathedral are only rung 12 times at midnight on New Year's Eve. The bells were cast from Turkish canon balls which reached the city when Turks seized the town in the 17th century. Their use is limited because of their tremendous weight. It has been customary when ringing on New Year's Eve, for every man on the Square to kiss every woman or girl on the Square and wish her a Happy New Year! The author does not know if this custom is observed to this day.

"A bad year²." The bells stop. The New Year has begun; it is 1938. With a face too serious for a New Years Eve, I reach a streetcar and go home. I walk through the glittering snow. Before going to sleep, I have one more thought. What will this New Year bring, and where will I be next New Years Eve?

January 2, 1938

We will still be out of school for a few more days. I study incessantly and try to remember everything for the upcoming final examinations. It is a constant worry to me. If I pass the exam, a path will be open to me: I will study further, I will be an educated man. How nice it is to dream about the future. I will enter a beautiful school, and will later hold a good position, will earn a lot of money and will support my parents. I will have a house, a beautiful and happy wife, a car . . . God, what will I not have? In the middle of my daydreams, my mother calls me for our meal. But I cannot eat the soup she has prepared because it contains cauliflower, and has a smell that I hate. After dinner I will go and visit my friend. There we have wonderful conversations, play and sing.

January 18, 1938

It is always the same thing. To rise at 7:00 in the morning, get dressed, and go to school. Five hours of sitting, all afternoon and evening devoted to studying and then go to sleep. I complain about this life very often and I say to myself, "How nice it would be to be free" and not have to go to school. School to me at this time is a Torture. Now in eighth grade³ the torment is not so strong because the worst is behind me, and for the

² In order to understand the feelings of that time, one must realize that Adolph Hitler had assumed power over Germany in 1933. The threat of occupation of other countries by Hitler and the threat of war was ever-present and increasing. Anti-Semitic measures against the Jews in Germany placed heavy burdens upon all the Jews of Europe.

³ the final grade of high school.

future I hope nothing but good will come of it. I realize that man must not dwell on bad thoughts and unsightly visions. If he can think only the good thoughts and see everything nice, he can instead unfold the future, broaden his thoughts, and live at peace with all. How nice it would be if one knew what the future brings. We always hope for the best, pushing away the negative aspects of life. How many would take their lives? How many would go insane if you could look into the future?

January 26, 1938

Something happened in school today. A Christian called a Jewish boy "Saujoud."⁴ This incident was known in the whole school because the school principal punished the pupil harshly. He gave him 16 hours of punishment consisting of staying after school for two hours every day, and performing various tasks. The Nazi colleagues were very upset. Of course, we the Jewish boys were very happy about this. Jews live in fear, and so take this word as an insult, but can do little about it because of the attitude of the government. We can discuss this with our Christian colleagues in peace; and some say, that the punishment was totally correct.

Those people do not feign friendship. They mean well and feel to a certain degree for us. But we know for sure that we can continue our friendship with the radical colleagues as well at least for the time being. After school, I go with a friend to the streetcar station. As we walk past a newsstand I read in red letters the headline "Two Nazis sentenced to death." "Not enough," I say to myself and continue to wait for the streetcar. The afternoon continues as usual. I force myself to continue my studies, and I am happy when I finish. But when I lie in bed, then the worries

⁴ "Jewish pig" is an abusive term used frequently by anti-Semites in German speaking countries.

continue. Will I be questioned in school tomorrow?
How will the final exam go?

February 2, 1938

Every day is like the other day. In school and at home it is always the same theme, the final exam. Not even one Sunday can be used for just lounging around. It is always study, study, and study again.

February 8, 1938

As I left school today to go to the streetcar, I heard the shouting "Extra, extra." Adolph Hitler has asked Kurt von Schuschnigg, the Chancellor of Austria, to come to his headquarters at Berchtesgaden to discuss the situation. The people are very nervous. We Jews are hoping that both parties might come to an agreement. The Nazis, however, are hoping for a quick union of Austria with the German Reich.

February 12, 1938

You only hear one conversation in Vienna. Hitler and Schuschnigg, and only one question: What will those two talk about? Also, in school everybody is excited; even during classes there are discussions. Today is the conference.

February 14, 1938

It seems strange that everything is very quiet about the conference at Berchtesgaden. There are a lot of rumors. You even hear that Hitler has threatened Schuschnigg with an ultimatum. All of our daily activities are now secondary. People never interested in politics are now discussing the Hitler-Schuschnigg meeting out in the streets. This evening I will go to the large hall where the general rehearsal for the big celebration of Makkabi⁵ will take place. This is a small distraction for everyone from the huge historical events currently taking place. Everyone hopes that political developments will go in their favor.

⁵ The Jewish sports organization.

February 20, 1938

Today, Adolph Hitler gives a three-hour speech in the Reichstag⁶, which is broadcast via all major radio stations. Even Austria will broadcast the speech. Most of it is empty talk, but Hitler is reading hundreds of data and statistics about his rebuilding programs. After this speech I go to the Sophia Halls⁷. Many bright and glittering lights illuminate the halls. On the honor stage are seated noted personalities from the state, from the Jewish community, and other groups. Now begins the festive entrance of the march.

Hundreds of Jewish boys and girls march into the Hall, and hundreds more of Jewish women and men cheer them on. A bright light illuminates a banner reading, "40 years of Makkabi Gymnastics." The Jewish elites of Vienna are gathered here to see part of their youth. After a speech from the President, the Hatikwa⁸ is sung. Later, everyone dances until late into the night.

What would people do if they could only envision events to occur in the near future?

February 24, 1938

In the evening I am with a friend. There I listen to the speech of Schussnigg. Looking at this speech objectively, it outweighs Hitler's speech in many, many ways. Even though the Austrian Jews in previous years had little reason to love this man, they today found sympathy for him because of his great and courageous speech. What he said was very clear and precise. Then

⁶ **T**he combined meeting of the German House of Commons and the Senate.

⁷ Large arena for public events.

⁸ The Jewish National Hymn

the Chancellor closed with the words: "Red, White, Red⁹ until death," followed by him and the members of the Parliament singing the National Hymn. Most people empathize with him. In the last few days, thousands of members of the Vaterländische Front¹⁰ (VF) became stronger supporters of a free Austria. We Jews say to ourselves that we should stay close to our Chancellor in coming days, as he may protect us from the worst enemy, Adolph Hitler.

March 8, 1938

Today, Schuschnigg while in Innsbruck said, that on Sunday a peoples' referendum will take place. The single question will be: For or against a free Austria? The excitement of the people is now at its highest. Many stores are closed. In front of the radio shops, hundreds of people are listening to the news and loudly voicing their opinion for or against Schuschnigg. In school, the colleagues associated with the VF party, now greet Jews only with "Austria," emphasizing their wish to have a free Austria. In the evening, masses of people are gathering in downtown Vienna and fights break out amongst Schuschnigg followers and the Nazis. The most fantastic rumors are being circulated. Everyone is in a state of feverish excitement and tries to hear news, spending many hours listening to radio broadcasts. Today, an amnesty was announced. Almost all political prisoners¹¹ were set free.

⁹ The Austrian flag.

¹⁰ Also known as "VF, or the Patriot's Front; the party of Chancellors' Schuschnigg and Dollfuss preceding. Dollfuss was murdered in 1934 by a Nazi fanatic, and succeeded by Schuschnigg.

¹¹ The Schuschnigg government had imprisoned thousands of Nazis, who for years had promoted the Anschluss (merging) of Austria with The Great German Reich. The prisoners were now immediately released in view of Hitler's threat to send his troops into Austria.

March 9, 1938

After leaving the gymnastics this evening, I saw Nazi troops marching in the street. They shouted in a chorus: "One nation, one state, one leader, and Jews go to hell." The shouting goes on and on with not one resting moment, and they keep marching. Some are already wearing the Nazi uniform, and others are carrying Nazi insignia. Suddenly, it has become permissible to carry the swastika. You can also see the three arrows' insignia of the VF. As the Nazi troops pass by, some of the Austrians are shouting "Austria, Austria!". Then fighting breaks out in masses. I have much trouble just finding shelter through a door into a shop to save myself and wait it out. Outside, the fighting goes on. Later at home, I lay in bed and cannot fall asleep. These happenings have a terrible effect on me. The level of excitement is so great that people are unable to sleep or function. One is waiting for new news, everyone seems to have heard this or that. We feel that historical events are occurring and will continue for many days to come.

March 10, 1938

In the morning I was at the clinic for a physical examination. The town seems to be quiet now, but more demonstrations are forecast for the evening. In the afternoon I study for the next school day. At 7:30 in the evening, my Aunt Eve calls to say that she heard from a foreign radio station that Schuschnigg has nominated Seyss Inquart¹² as our new Chancellor. Our excitement is unbelievable. My mother calls her friends and I hurry to the radio. In the meantime, Papa comes home and tells us that he has heard nothing and that everything is quiet. All of a sudden, an

¹² An Austrian lawyer who, during the war, became the Head of the German Occupation Regime in The Netherlands. Standing before the Neuremberg Court after the war, he was ultimately hanged as a war criminal.

announcement comes over the radio saying: "Attention! Attention! Here speaks your Chancellor, Kurt von Schuschnigg." Everybody is listening and a feverish anticipation of new events is felt. "Fellow Austrians, Comrades. I am yielding to the power and I greet my people for the last time with the words, 'May God protect Austria'!" In moments like this, a person is unable to think. We do not know what to say; we are defeated.

On the radio we hear announcers say, "Schuschnigg do not resign" and right afterwards you hear the Austrian hymn, but you can hear it only faintly. A historical event has taken place; we live in historical moments. Tears are filling our eyes, we look at each other, and we understand each other. In these minutes, we do not need to speak, as everyone knows what is in the souls of others. We cannot understand or even try to understand what we just heard. The moon emerges from behind the clouds and shines brightly over the land. I stand inside my window and look to the outside. In the stillness, I say to myself almost automatically, "Could it be possible: We are now in Germany?". That one word shatters the bond which held us in these moments. Germany is Hitler, and this name says it all to us. Thoughts race through our heads. Again, a sound comes from the radio and now it is the voice of Seyss Inquart. He demands discipline from the people and underlines that with the coming of the German troops everything must be done in peace. Papa is of the opinion that we should leave immediately. But he knows very well that this is impossible. Until late in the night, up to 2:00, we pace up and down in the room. Finally, we all go to bed. Without any sleep I toss and turn. All of a sudden, out in the yard, our drunken janitor starts to scream. All night long he shouts "Heil Hitler" and "Hang the Jews." This is the initiation of a new state. Late in the morning hours, I finally fall asleep. My last thoughts are, "God save Austria."

March 11, 1938

The first sunlight brings the awakening spring into my room. It lights up the walls and shadows cling

along the drawers. Outside, you can hear songs of the birds. I just awoke. A little while I lay here half asleep and realize nothing. But suddenly I look out the window. Is it possible? I rub my eyes and take a closer look. Yes, over there across the street on the house is a flag raised; a flag which is for us a symbol of evil. The red shines brightly. In the middle is a white circle containing a swastika. And there is another flag and there and there and there . . . More and more I see.

I lay back in bed and bury my head in the pillows. I will not think. Slowly, I see and acknowledge; I feel like a stone in the sea, a sea of swastikas and banners. I am only a small part of that stone. I think further; the whole stone is the Jewish people of Germany. What will this stone endure? How often will it be intimidated or beaten, and how often will it lose or allow parts of it's innards to be taken out?

In front of my bedroom door, I hear the voice of a radio speaker. My parents are pale and tired. They have not closed their eyes. Now we hear that a vote will take place tomorrow. Stores, schools, and government buildings are closed until further notice. All morning Mama moans. She cannot bear to look at that flag on the house across the street anymore. We draw the curtains over our windows. In the meantime, the janitor has started to yell again. As I go out to get milk, papa holds me back, because the janitor is acting crazy in the yard and acts like he is going to smash all the windows of the two Jewish families in the house, one of them being the landlord. He yells very loudly, "We will hang you all. I am now the landlord." I must wait a long time by the door, and as he goes into his apartment, I sneak by very quickly. Enraged, I say to myself, "We cannot even go freely where we want to go." In the streets everything is quiet. From all the houses flags are bristling in the breeze; most of the people have swastika insignia fastened to their jackets. The day is quiet. We sit and stare into emptiness; we try to visualize our future, but cannot.

Again we think and think, how it was in Germany, what rules we have to follow, etc. We do not eat almost all day long, and we are unable to do anything;

we still cannot fathom what is occurring. But one thing we know; one thing is very clear to us and we can easily comprehend! We know something terrible is coming, something, that we don't know yet, which we cannot foresee or even understand. Every one knows, that our lives will be changed, that we must start a new chapter in our lives, which will bring us nothing but bad experience. In the next few days we must see and wait, for a block which will fall from the sky and hit us.

March 13, 1938

All of Austria is in an uproar. Today everyone will vote. It is like a theater act to be presented to the world. The end result is already determined. In the morning we hear from the radio: "Hello, hello, here is the Reichssender ¹³ Vienna with the weather forecast for Bavaria and German Austria..." This announcement is terrible for us to hear even though it is the understandable reality.

Today we hear that many people have already fled, and that others have committed suicide. To our surprise, heroes are still around. We hear that a whole officers group in one of the Vienna barracks has broken their sabers. Heroes! Most of the people, however, behave like they are crazy. People previously behaving falsely as if against the Nazi's are now their most fanatic followers. Everywhere you hear "Heil Hitler" in loud voices from people with their right hand raised; we now live in a witch's brew.

March 14, 1938

We are still in a daze. Today, Hitler will arrive in Vienna. This day will be a milestone in history everybody says. Hundreds of thousands of the Viennese population hurry downtown to the Heldenplatz¹⁴, where

¹³ German state radio station.

¹⁴ The Hero's Square in Vienna.

Hitler will speak. Long before his arrival the masses of people roar, 'Ein Volk, ein Reich, ein Fuhrer¹⁵'. When Hitler finally arrives the roaring becomes so terrible, that we turn off our radio; that doesn't help much. Our neighbors, if not in town, have their radio turned up to the highest volume. All day long they cheer and celebrate. I ask myself, "When will the time come for us to celebrate and cheer?" I think, never.

March 20, 1938

The schools are still closed. In the last few days terrible things have happened. Personal enemies let their rage out on their foes. Again and again, Jewish women and men are confronted. I feel I am back in the Middle Ages. Arrests and suicides are now daily events. A few of the sadistic beasts have a particular satisfaction, to visit the Jews by day and night to search their houses for "communistic materials." Jewish women are forced to use knives to scrape off Schussnigg posters, mounted on walls and posts of the streets, touting the upcoming vote. As I walk through the ninth district today I see a gathering of people surrounding Jews, including elderly ladies, who were ordered to wash a Krukkenkreuz¹⁶ off of the street with toothbrushes. As one elderly Jewish man could not bend his knees to go down and brush, one of the SA¹⁷ men gave him a harsh kick with his boot. All around this scene were people cheering, people once called the

¹⁵ One people, one State, one Leader.

¹⁶ The cross-shaped insignia of the VF party.

¹⁷ "SA" is one of the two military groups (the other being the "SS") used by Hitler to terrorize the populations. The SS, under the leadership of Heinrich Himmler, was responsible for all concentration camps. Of the Nazis ultimately convicted as war criminals, a great number came from their ranks.

socialistic and friendly Viennese. Vienna, the town of sophistication and joviality. The beast in the people awakes. Now the day has come, when a person can let out all sadistic tendencies. The women are the worst. Horrified, I turn away, and, without a direction, I wander the streets, the picture of which has changed dramatically.

Suddenly, I see fields, white fields. Men and women work and sweat. Some of them are carrying heavy loads while others plow the earth. Behind them stand large men with strong whips. Momentarily, one of the workers lets his load fall in order to rest a few seconds. A whip comes down very suddenly through the air and falls on the man's back. He gathers up his load and continues his moaning further. What has changed since the Jews were slaves in Egypt? Is it a lie, that the culture has advanced itself in 2000 years? Today in Vienna it seems that we stand in the same place we stood 2000 years ago. Must we carry our loads throughout history in the same way?

March 28, 1938

Today, school has begun. Many fellow students are wearing uniforms and even the boys who have been members of Schussnigg's VF party have put swastika tags on their jackets and smocks. However, we are very surprised that our fellow students behave themselves properly. Some ignore us, others are sympathetic, and still others discuss the present situation with us. Yelling and fighting are not permitted and do not take place during school hours; only politics are discussed. The professors¹⁸ at the beginning of lessons greet us with their hand raised: "Heil Hitler", and everyone answers in the same way. During one lesson, I hear a student telling someone, how he cut one Jew's beard and hair, followed by a snicker so loud that the professor scolds them. "It is not fitting for a national-socialist boy to interrupt the class." "German heroes"

¹⁸ High school teachers are referred to as professors in Austria.

who brag about their acts of heroism. With us, they talk normally and in a friendly manner, but the whole atmosphere in our school has a very negative effect on us. The streets are littered with all forms of propaganda for the upcoming voting. The life of the Jews in the community is totally dead. Only few dare to go out in the streets. You hear many weird rumors; if only they were not true, but, unfortunately, they are true.

April 4, 1938

We are all creatures of habit. We are slowly getting used even to these events. The swastika flags, the insignia, and the greetings, have become daily sights. When we hear that someone had to endure something terrible, we can only shake our heads and try to forget it within the next few minutes. We slowly become totally numb to the events which are taking place in our homes and streets. In school, all kinds of unusual things happen. Our school colleagues behave as usual, but those of lower classes fight regularly with their Jewish classmates. We, the oldest boys, formed a protective group which controls all of the hallways. This does not always work, so that the school administrators have to settle these conflicts. The professors treat us fairly well. We do not hear criticism or negative remarks from them. In the first half of the month of May, we will have the written final examination. In the past, this final examination has been a big worry for me. But now I hardly think about it anymore. I don't care, if I pass it or not. My main thought is that I must leave this hell.

April 7, 1938

The closer we get to April 10, the stronger the propaganda becomes for the upcoming election. Something like this, we have never seen before. Leaflets, graffiti, placards, information, and even poetry is given to everyone so that they are coached how to vote. In school the fighting continues. When two Jewish families meet, one tries to outdo the other telling of hard tales and happenings. Now, the people

in power take Jews, not just to scrub streets, but to clean the barracks and do all sorts of unpleasant tasks. Now we are cheap labor. We hear that young girls are held prisoners in barracks for several days, and when freed, refuse to discuss what happened to them. The Jewish people greatly hesitate to go out into the streets, but often find it necessary. Few escape being taken to work or to perform some kind of labor. The new leaders deliver hate messages via radio and newspaper, which enrage people and turn them even more into beasts, only to direct their rage against the Jewish neighborhoods. We are totally isolated from the outer world.

Being caught while listening to Radio Moscow means receiving a death penalty. In the newspapers you find articles every day, which tell people of the numerous crimes committed by Jews. Everyday, groups of young boys are marched into the streets where Jews live, to destroy shops, smash windows, and plunder homes and stores. Most of the Jewish shops are now totally empty.

April 10, 1938

The day for the big spectacle has finally arrived. Now we play in a gigantic theater with all the actors laughing into the face of the world. The result of this big election has long before been determined. In the early evening hours of the election day, the first results are broadcast.

The process of this election is very interesting for us. You go to the polling place and are given a piece of paper with the word "yes" written on it. If you decline to accept the piece of paper, you are automatically registered as an "enemy" of the state. In the late evening hours it was broadcast that 99% voted "yes."¹⁹ To our big surprise, even in Vienna, we find some courageous people that decline the ballot and say "no."

¹⁹ "Yes", that Austria joins Germany, and "yes", for Hitler as the leader.

An objective bystander must ask himself, "How is it possible, that a few men lie to the whole world and to their own people?" In this drama, the end result is set and no man can fathom the results. The motto of a great country and period, "Austria erit in orbe ultima"²⁰ is gone. The name "Austria" is now erased from the map; Austria is no more. Our last hero (Schussnigg), of whom we were proud, is now in prison; the love for his cuntry has prohibited him from leaving the country. Even though he was freely offered the opportunity to leave, he chose to stay with his people. Perhaps he still dreams about a future free Austria. Austria erit in orbe ultima.

April 22, 1938

Life goes on in its usual way. We learn a lot in school now. The infamous actions of the National Socialist Government go on. But we have already to some degree been hardened by these actions, and we do not wish to tolerate them. The life of the Jew is now dead and nobody even tries to organize activities. Our most terrible enemies are the housemaids, the janitors, and other personal workers; these people often had Jewish supervisors, and workers now feel that vindictive actions are protected by the government. But even persons who were befriended with Jews before, try to distance themselves from us now. All cafes and restaurants are forbidden to serve Jews. Also, many schools are now closed to Jews.

April 23, 1938

Tonight at around 12:00 midnight I heard rapid detonations, one right after the other. A few minutes later, terrifying cries for help were heard down in the yard. The sounds were so terrible, that it shook my whole body. Yelling and screaming, someone came up the steps and rang our bell. At the same time, someone else yelled for help in the most urgent tones. This screaming was so inhuman sounding that the words could

not be understood nor who the person might be. Papa went to the door in a hurry and was so shaken by the sounds, that he had difficulty opening the door. When he finally succeeded, the janitor's wife, drenched with blood, fainted and fell to the floor. She had a bullet in her foot and also in her wrist; blood was seeping out onto the floor. Soon about 10 persons were standing around in the hallway, police as well as private persons. In the meantime, Mama tried to awaken the woman. Later, she was taken away by an ambulance. As we came to the janitor's apartment, we found him dead. He had killed himself. These happenings had devastating impact for us.

We did not feel any malicious joy but a certain burden was taken from us; the man who had created so much harm to us, had condemned himself. In his shed, the police found two rifles and several bottles of hydrochloric acid. Because this man was not in his right mind, we assume that he planned some terrible actions for the future. We thank God from the bottom of our hearts that everything turned out this way. Is there nothing from which we may be spared?

May 6, 1938

Today is my birthday. I am thinking "should I celebrate this day or should I mourn?" The mood on this day is in accordance with what happens around us. Papa even forgot to congratulate me. It is no wonder, because we are all thinking, "What is going to happen today or tomorrow?" and we have no time to think about ourselves. Now, they not only try to oppress our Jewish freedom, they are also trying to take away our daily bread. Many shops are closed and Nazis are working to take them away from the Jewish people. In the last few days, I could forget about the happenings in my immediate world, because I had to study hard for the final examination.

May 14, 1938

Even though this is the first day of the written examination, I have slept well and feel calm. Entering the school causes mounting tension. All you see is men in black suits, giving a festive impression of the

whole scenario. At 8:00 AM we will begin. The first subject is German. All pupils must write a paper on the theme, "Why Great Germany?" After writing for five hours, I somehow managed to muster eighteen pages. In this essay, I liked to look at everything objectively, and closed with the following sentence: "Even if the Third Reich should falter, even if its' leaders could not serve anymore, the German people will always emphasize their greatness as did Karl the Great, Bismarck, and Adolph Hitler."

In the afternoon, I will sleep for some time so as to prepare for the next day.

May 15, 1938

Today I am a little more nervous; the examination covers Latin. Because we went through the schedule of goals a few days ahead of time, I am convinced that I cannot complete this work without help. But things are turning out differently. The professor enters, and the room becomes so quiet that you could hear a pin drop. He has just handed out the third text when a mumbling is passing from chair to chair. I have hidden ten translations in my jacket lining, which may provide some help. After three hours of hard work I finally get through the Latin part of the examination. All of my preparation was worth it, and I go home, satisfied.

May 17, 1938

Yesterday was Mathematics and today is English. Both subjects should be easy because I was ready for both, and I had a good essay in mind. Today is a beautiful day. The sun shines brightly on this spring day and lights up blossoms on the trees. In the afternoon, I went to the top of a hill (close to where we live), and sat there for a long time, looking down upon the town. It is amazing that I find this springtime awakening of nature very different. Before, you were living with springtime, and enjoyed the greening of the season. But now, I am empty of such feelings and these pictures are absent. Beautifully, the town lays before me. I sit all alone in the open and try to forget what has happened. How beautiful this town once was. But now, I look only a short time

and I already see a flag with the swastika.

Suddenly, I was called back to the everyday, and all the terrible pictures and happenings come into my mind. I decide that I must leave this town so that I cannot see it anymore; I must try to forget my birth town. But my thoughts cannot be stopped. I say to myself, "Can I just forget about this town, in which I was born and raised, and in which I have felt so much happiness?" I know that I can never forget. Again, I see a shimmering of a flag. I get up and go home.

I also know that we must never forget our misfortunes. Our misfortune is constantly held before our eyes, and I fear we will experience reminders, so that Jewish people can never rest. Slowly, the sun vanishes behind a dark cloud.

May 22, 1938

Today, I had a very big disappointment. My examination was graded "not satisfactory" for the subject of German, and the reason was that the final sentence was not in accordance with the ideology of the National Socialism. I must now go and take an oral test on the third of June to recite German literature. I must try to learn an enormous volume of material within a few days, an unbelievable amount of work. In the last few weeks, I have not paid much attention to the things going on, but I am glad because I didn't want to know much about it.

May 28, 1938

It is now 5:00 AM and I sit at our porch to study German literature. Early in the day I study more easily and learn the most, because it is quiet and nobody bothers me. I know I can comprehend this material and that gives me the opportunity to really know a lot about German literature. All the rest of the work for my final examination was satisfactory. It should be known, that the professor who graded my paper, "Why Great Germany?", was formerly a committed socialist. It doesn't matter what these people were previously; they have all fallen to a new idealism.

June 3, 1938

At 8:00 AM the examination begins. I am totally at peace because I know the material quite well. Only a chicanery by my professor can change this. Already the room by itself has an unwelcome feeling on me. The foremost wall has an illuminated picture of Adolph Hitler. The other walls are covered with flags. Just like at a trial, the judges are sitting at a table which is elevated. Even though you could be unnerved, by the scene, my nerves seem to be calm and I try to think only of the material. Many of my colleagues have come in uniform, to make an impression on the "judges."²¹

The questions are handed out on paper. I see right away that I know the questions very well, and that I will surely pass the examination with good results. Without any interruption I go through all of them. After that, we have a little festivity at which the "judges" are wished well, and say "goodbye" to their students who, after eight years, are leaving. Very slowly, I go down the stairs and outside into the warm spring air. What happiness I would have felt, if I could have passed the matura under different circumstances. With a sad face, I go into one of the shops in front of our school to call my parents to tell of my success. Then for the last time, I pick up my satchel and go home by foot.

In the park, all the spring bushes are in bloom. In the sandboxes, children play and are building tunnels. I remember that I long ago used to play like these children. Today, I feel that a heavy burden is taken from my shoulders after attending 8 years of high school. How would I have enjoyed this new freedom, if I would have not been looking into such an uncertain future!

June 15, 1938

Free time is something new to me. I try to relax from all the stress of the last few days. But this

²¹ Actually the professors or teachers.

will not last long, because having made the decision to leave Austria, I must secure necessary documents to leave the country; we all think about this both day and night. One has to visit many offices and stand in lines for many hours. The whole process may require several weeks to complete.

Our lives have now become quieter. In France, a family member has arranged a place for us to go, and we hope that we can leave very soon.

June 26, 1938

It is 5:30 in the morning, and I already feel exhausted, but I am again bicycling to the tax bureau. Today is the eighth time that I have left early in the morning to go there. So far, I have not even been able to enter the building due to the crowd already waiting before me. I ride very fast through the quiet streets. The fresh morning air is beautiful. But how nice would it have been if we could spend our vacation with our grandparents as we have done during our whole life.

As I arrive at the tax bureau, hundreds of people are already there, always the sight. Everyday I get up a half hour earlier, just to be there before the crowd arrives. But it doesn't matter; many people seem to arrive the night before to stand in line. The tax bureau handed out numbers in order to organize the turn for each Jew who wants to leave the country. Each person has to receive a written declaration that all taxes had been paid (even children who had never paid taxes or persons who have no income); this declaration is necessary in order to apply for a passport. A substantial number of people are trading their numbers issued by the tax bureau, for money or bread for their families.

Terrible treatment is inflicted on those in line. The police are constantly holding and shoving back the tired mass of people. They are pressing the Jews together like a herd of sheep. I know again today, that I will not be able to see anyone at the tax office today. But as I have nothing else to do, I will stand in line and hope to be called.

I see a tired, bent over old lady sitting on a

stool. As I come nearer to her, she awakens and looks at me. Her look conveys nothing but grief and misery. I ask her if she is waiting in line to get her papers for a passport. She looks forlorn into the distance and says very slowly as to herself, "My husband and both sons are all in Dachau²²" "They have taken my happiness away from me. For what must I live?" "You are still alive," I say. "Yes," she answers, "but I do not wish to be buried in this damned earth." I asked in a soft tone, "What did your husband do for a living?" Again she looks at me and says, "He was Director of 'Phoenix'²³; we were rich with a house and car." Suddenly, she breaks down crying and buries her face in her hands. "A peoples' fate", I think to myself. "Back up you damn Jews", yells a policeman and he again presses the mass of people together.

July 8, 1938

For sometime now, our Zionist Youth Organization has been permitted again. I lead a group of 15 year old boys. They are fine boys and a lot of fun to be with. In the last few days, I have, when not standing in line, gone with the boys to the Donau²⁴ to swim. Today is also a day like that. We meet in Nussdorf²⁵ and walk together in two's so as not to attract attention. Days like these are very nice. We swim and lay in the sun, forgetting for several hours all the misery, which is taking place down in the town. But even here we are not very safe. As soon as we see

22 Dachau was the first concentration camp in Germany.

23 One of the largest insurance companies in Austria.

24 The River Danube.

25 A prominent suburb of Vienna.

someone passing us, we do not speak and we look away from them. "What a fine destiny", I think to myself, we cannot even go out on the street without being noticed and placed in danger. All these little happenings, urges me to say again and again: "Out, out of this hell."

July 26, 1938

The hot summer season has brought some peace and slowed down the activities from the new rulers. Besides standing in line to secure emigration papers and going swimming, we have very little else to do. Even the new politicians have taken summer vacations and everything is quiet.

August 28, 1938

Also in the month of August, not much has happened and even normal Jewish life has to a certain extent resumed. Even some special spas located on the outskirts of Vienna, are again visited by Jews. This is the first time that I have been in Vienna in the summer and it makes me uneasy; there is still a mental oppression that is felt amongst the Jews. We now are not allowed to go to summer resorts or to swim in public swimming pools or to go to any other festivity that is taking place.

After weeks of standing in line, I finally was able to get the papers from the tax bureau which are necessary to apply for a passport. But to think of leaving is out of the question, because recently, nearly all states have greatly restricted Jewish immigration. My uncle in France has for sometime tried to have us come there, but he has not received permission so far. I would very much like to go to another country illegally, but my parents are very much against it and want to wait.

September 15, 1938

Today, after two months of waiting, I finally have my passport. But, for what do I have a passport if I am not permitted to enter another country? One could leave, but was required to show an immigration permission of a foreign country. In any case, I am

ready for departing on a moments notice.

September 24, 1938

For a few weeks now, something is going on in the political scene. A "cry" is going through the German Reich "Sudetenland."²⁶ In all newspapers, all advertisements, all you hear is that the Sudetenland must "come home." Every day for hours, you hear hateful speeches against Czechoslovakia. Now it has come so far that the Czechs in Vienna are treated just like the Jews. Their schools are demolished, and their shops robbed and plundered. Today, Hitler threatened to occupy Sudetenland, and make it a part of Germany. For us personally, this situation does not have much significance, but we are very much interested to see what the rest of the world will say about this action.

The summer vacations have ended, and also the relief from the National Socialist's infamous actions. Everywhere again you hear of riots, robberies and other sadistic games of the oppressor and it's henchmen. Because the Nazis cannot personally avenge themselves adequately on the Czechoslovakian people, they take out all of their hatred on the more vulnerable Jews. Even the people as a whole were provoked with the idea: The Jews are guilty of the war, they staged it, to be able to conduct their dealings. Hour by hour, we think of the danger of war, and we must get ready for the worst. War would decide our fate. That we know for sure.

September 27, 1938

When walking home today with one of my friends, he tells me, that he is thinking of leaving the country illegally as there are rumors of war. He invited me to go along with him and told me that everything may be pretty safe. A guide would take us to Switzerland for 600 marks. I am excited about this plan. As I come

²⁶ A part of Northwestern Czechoslovakia, the major population being about 3 million Germans. When Hitler reached power they wanted to "come home." Hitler's troops occupied the Sudetenland in September, 1938 and it was declared part of the German Reich.

home and tell my parents about the plan, my father says that tomorrow a meeting between Hitler, Mussolini, Chamberlain and Daladier²⁷ would take place in Munich. Because of this development the danger of a war is somewhat lessened and I also had to admit that it would be better to wait. We all feel that an enormous load has been taken from our shoulders. It is unthinkable to realize what would happen to us, if war should break out.

September 29, 1938

Again we see days of enormous historical significance. Each individual must now wait and see how a few men, whether bad or good, are to decide our fate. Everything lies in the hands of these few men. If they should decide on war, then the masses, which always have to obey, must march; perhaps millions forced to march to their death. In the last few days, as the ghost of the war came crashing down upon us, we again see the terrible visions of war years. But now the danger seems to be gone, and again, the western free world is forced to concede. Adolph Hitler is the only winner in all this. Again, as last March, the whole of Germany is in an uproar, and, like then, there seems to be no end of celebrating and thanking the Fuhrer.

October 5, 1938

It is 10:00 o'clock in the evening, and I just turned out the light and covered myself with a blanket. But, shortly although half asleep, I hear our doorbell ring. Then, Papa is talking with someone in a hushed voice, and assuming it is the new janitor, I try again to go to sleep. After ten minutes, my sister comes hurriedly into my room to tell me very excitedly, that a familiar SA man was here with the information that all Jews have to leave Vienna by 6:00 o'clock in the morning. A number of trains are ready for them at the

²⁷ Prime Ministers for Great Britain and France, respectively.

train station. I naturally started to laugh very loud and told them that today is not April 1!²⁸

In the homes, we now hear a lot of clatter and slamming of doors. I jumped out of bed and as I looked at my father, I knew, that this information was true. My mother ran around like crazy in our rooms and her whole body was shaking. I myself could not fathom this. One hundred and fifty thousand people are to be leaving within a few hours. No, this could be only a joke, to get us frightened just before Yom Kippur. This must be a joke of people teasing us. While everyone is standing here like stone figures, I rush to the telephone to ring our relatives. Everywhere I hear the same. We do not know what we should do.

At 1:30 AM I go to the front door to receive some relatives, who come to talk with all of us about this situation. The street light shines on the leaves that the wind has blown in front of our house. The image of the street lantern is reflected in the wet streets. I cannot imagine, I say to myself, "Can all this be possible?" Openly, my father says, "It would be the best, to go to Saarbrücken²⁹ immediately." My mother is totally weakened and overcome by all this. We do not know what we should do with her. We scurry around very excitedly, it is already 2:00 AM. Exhausted, I go to my room. I would like to sleep and try to forget everything, but to forget is impossible. I finally fall asleep.

October 6, 1938

I rise at 6:00 in the morning, and go right away to the train station to get information. But when I arrive, I am stopped by a train official, and when I tell him why I am here, he laughs at me. At home they already know that all this was a very bad joke from the

²⁸ April fool's day.

²⁹ A town in Western Germany not far from the border with France.

Vienna party officials. This has served its purpose because most of the Jews could not now observe Yom Kippur. These are jokes which some of the officials of the state can do. Can we still live here? No, it is impossible. The wish becomes more and more to flee from this hell. Yom Kippur of 1938 will always be remembered by the Viennese Jews.

October 23, 1938

For a long time, I have been very active in the Zionist organization. Many times, I am away from home all day or for several days, because I am leading several groups. This kind of work diverts me from our everyday life. Recently, I asked the Zionist organization Hechaluz³⁰ to put me on a list for Hachshara³¹ In my group there are a few boys, who are very talented. So we come together on this evening, to hear the Ninth Symphony of Beethoven. This symphony provides a very special event for me. Through this music, I try to relive everything that has happened to me over the last few months. Every high tone brought back memories of the bad experiences which I have had. Later, I also tried with the beautiful tones to look into the future. The tones are swelling to a crescendo, rejoicing in the highest, and at the same time sinking into the deepest darkness. At the end, everything is solved and there is quietness and reconciliation. In last part, the "Hymn of Joy", the music comes to its highest and strongest tones, and all becomes happy with a feeling of fraternity. Everything has come together from the past and everyone lives in happiness and peace.

³⁰ "The Pioneer." This was a Zionist organization that educated and prepared boys and girls for a future life in Palestine.

³¹ Hebrew term for the preparation process, conducted by the Hechaluz, for jobs as farmer, gardener, artisan.

November 7, 1938

In the last few days, not much has happened, but today it was announced that a staff member of the German Embassy in Paris, named von Rath, was shot by a young Jewish boy from Poland, named Grunspan. The Jewish population is extremely excited, because they fear some kind of revenge coming. Because of von Rath's serious condition, the tension becomes higher hour by hour; we must assume the worst to come.

November 9, 1938

On this day, von Rath died from the gunshot wound. Nothing was said about the Jews, but everyone feels, that something is going to happen³².

November 10, 1938

I entered the kitchen in the morning, and I saw Papa wash himself. I sat down and said to him, "Why do you wash yourself so thoroughly?" Five minutes later our doorbell rings and I open it. A man stands at the door and asked to talk to my father. He then leads my father to the local office of the National Socialist Party, like all the other thousands of Jews who are taken to prison all over Germany. My mother goes up and down, from one side to the other in the room. I am unable to have a clear thought. I walk down to the local office and come at the right moment, just as they ~~are putting~~ my father into a car and take him away. We do not know what will happen. It seems something terrible is going to occur.

Slowly, I go home again; I do not know if I should tell my mother what I have seen. Openly, I fight with myself, as to whether I should tell her. For a long time she looks into the street; she does not seem to see me, and then she totally breaks down. "I will never see him again, my husband, my man." I pet her, I

³² On this night of November 9-10, mass damage was inflicted upon synagogues all over Germany. The night is recorded in history as the Kristallnacht ("Crystal Night"), due to the multitudes of pieces of glass from the demolished windows covering the streets.

try to calm her down, but nothing helps. Desperately, she turns from one side to the other on her bed. At this time, I see the whole Jewish population under the butcher's knife.

Suddenly, I feel a hate in me coming on, a worldly hate, that I cannot control, and I swear revenge. Revenge for my father, for all the thousands of brothers, which today are taken to prisons, to suffer the worst in their lives. Here are human beings behaving as sadistic beasts in treating their fellow creatures. November 10, a progrom³³ is organized over the German Jews, a progrom in the twentieth century. This is only possible in a land without culture; in a land, where beasts possess all the power. I must be careful not to become a beast myself. Will this revenge against these people ever come to an end? November 10, a day of cruelty and shame, a day never to be forgotten as long as we live. How many tears must flow today, how many people have lost all hope, where any hope is left?

The November fog slowly settles upon the town, enveloping it, like a veil of death which darkens our souls. At home, the women weep, children cry, and in the prisons they squeeze people together like a herd of cattle. It is 10 PM, and many women stay before the Rossauer Kazerne³⁴ and look up on the building with eyes red from crying. A few of the Hitler youth members jubilantly pass by and mock them. It is raining now and even the sky seems to have sorrow for the people, who tear themselves apart.

³³ "Progrom" was a massacre, especially against Jews in the 19th century carried out in eastern Europe, by Cossacks or poor farmers in Russia and Poland.

³⁴ The "Rossauer Barracks" was one of the notorious headquarters in Vienna for the SA troops of the German Reich.

November 12, 1938

"Is this life still liveable?", we say to ourselves. We do not know where members of our family are, not even if they are still alive. Within a few days my mother has totally changed; she goes around in a daze. I sit for hours with a friend, who has come to us, and we are hiding in the basement as they are now also looking for young Jewish boys.

We ask ourselves, "What did we do?" In Vienna, the number of prisoners is estimated to be thousands. Their and our destiny is totally in darkness. Day and night, the women stand in front of the prisons, depressed and dejected.

November 14, 1938

Our mood is undescrivable. For many days we know absolutely nothing. Where is my father? Today we hear rumors that all prisoners are already in Dachau. We must not think at all what is coming in the future. The ruins of our souls and material things are still before us. Desperation reaches its height today, because we do not know, what will happen tomorrow. All Jewish shops are closed and barred, most of them demolished. In the streets you hardly see any Jews, because they have tried to hide themselves from the criminals. They sleep out in the open, to escape what will inevitably come. Still, hundreds of women stand in front of the prisons and look at the bare walls under the grey sky and wait, and wait.

November 16, 1938

Today we finally got a card from my father. He is in a prison in Kenyongasse³⁵. I immediately go there with clothing and groceries. Already, there are many people there. You can only leave the package. It is a small comfort, but at least we know that my father is still in Vienna.

November 17, 1938

As I arrive at home in the evening, my mother comes rushing to the door. "Papa is here!", she yells with tears running down her face. For a moment I cannot even fathom that this is true, and almost fear going into the house. My father is unrecognizable. I cannot believe, that a person could change like that in one week.

Until 2:00 in the morning, we sit and listen to what he has to say. He tells of things from a foreign land, a land in which animals live. What I hear, I cannot believe. I cannot even picture what he describes. The program seems to have been stopped by the authorities. Only the synagogues which are burned out and the empty, demolished Jewish shops are the witnesses of German culture in the twentieth century. The ruins will perhaps be removed, and the shops repaired. But, one thing cannot be removed or repaired, something will stay with us as long as we live, and as long our children can tell their children. The hate against Germany will be with us and for future generations.

November 28, 1938

Again after the first tidal flow, the ebbtide seems to have come. Slowly, we recover and begin to understand what has happened. The Jewish life slowly begins to take breath again.

November 30, 1938

This evening I come home a bit later than usual. My father is very agitated and comes to meet me, to tell me that I should not be out so late. My mother joins my father, reciting how dangerous it may be in the streets. At 12:00 I fall asleep.

December 1, 1938

I get up a little late, and go to the kitchen to wash. My father again mumbles something about yesterday evening. I tell him, that my prospects to leave the country are not too hopeful. In passing I tell him, that a friend of mine has traveled illegally to Amsterdam and for a week now, he is doing well. My

father mentions that I may be able to ask his parents how he got there.

In the morning, I am in town, and visit this friend's parents. There I hear, that his brother also left yesterday. Around noon I tell my parents that it would perhaps be best to leave next week. As I lay on the sofa, after our meal, I think about my situation very thoroughly. Suddenly, I come to a decision: I must leave today. I have thought about this for several weeks. And, in a few minutes I have come to a conclusion: I have to leave, and I have to leave now. My mother will not and cannot fathom this, but I do not give in. Today I will leave; today I must get out of this hell and look towards a better future. I call my friend Fredl. He does not think very long, and within seconds he decides to go with me. "We will leave at 11:00 tonight", he says through the telephone. And I respond loudly, "Yes, at 11:00."

The boys of my Zionist youth group are informed and come immediately to say goodbye. It is already 7:30 PM and I go to my uncle, to say goodbye there. Like being chased, I go with my bicycle on the wet streets. For the last time I will be on my bike, I think. My uncle is so astounded, that he can only say: "Hope to see you again, in Paris." At home there are approximately 30 persons, friends and acquaintances, who would like to say "Goodbye" to me. Suddenly our electricity goes off, and the lights go out; a bad omen, I think. By candlelight I sit down with my boys, and for the last time we sing our sad songs. The goodbyes are very short. My mother still stands, and cannot believe, what is taking place. My father and Fredl's father go with us to the train station.

It is 11:00 o'clock in the night. Slowly, the train is starting. As we said "Goodbye" and as we jumped on the train, my father gives me a medallion. "May God look over you", is the inscription on this medallion. The train moves faster and faster. My father stands at the train station and waves goodbye looking extremely depressed and withdrawn. The train passes wobbling through Heiligenstadt, Purkersdorf... and all of a sudden I wake up like out of a few taxi drivers, where the synagogue is. Nobody can answer me.

Without a destination we walk the streets of Cologne. Everything is decked out with Christmas decorations. Garlands and stars made of pine branches are stretched across the streets. Brilliant lights illuminate the streets deep sleep and look around. Suddenly, I begin to realize what I have done. Eighteen years I lived in nice and happy conditions in my parents house, and now I am underway to the unknown. But the urgency for freedom is much stronger than the urgency for the homeland. The even sounds of the clattering of the train are embedded in my mind. "What will come, what will come?" I lean back in my seat, and look at my watch. It is 12:00 at night exactly. The first of December is now past. Yesterday, I could not foresee in my wildest dreams what was to take place today. December 1, this day, will forever be in my thoughts. I reach into my pocket for the medallion. "May God look over you.". I think about this all the time and the rocking of the train finally puts me into a light sleep.

December 2, 1938

It is impossible to sleep. In a low voice I talk with Fredl, and question what will happen in the morning when we arrive in Cologne. We ride into darkness, into a very uncertain future. Slowly the train stops in Passau. We now leave the former Austria behind us. All night long I brood by myself. Again and again, we try to picture what will be. Fredl thinks surely somebody in Cologne will be able to advise us. We sit in our seats like the persecuted; we do not speak to anyone, and try to avoid every uniformed person. It is impossible for me to see how we will ever reach Holland. In the morning we travel through the Rhein Valley. The beauty of this land lets us forget about our worries. At 5:30 PM we arrive, very excited, in the large station of Cologne.

We depart the train and go out to the street. In front of the train station we see the massive dome of Cologne, and I have the feeling that a big load is about to come down upon me. I ask a and shops, and people, everywhere people, and more people.

The masses are pushing us forward. At a newspaper

stand, I ask again, "Where is a synagogue?" An elderly man offers to take us there. "You walk on the sidewalk", he says, "and I on the street, so nobody sees that I am walking with Jews." "May these be the last impressions of the Third Reich", I think and continue in bitterness. Finally, we reach the synagogue. Inside we run into a man, who is ready to leave. "What?", he yells at us, "illegally crossing the border? We have been sitting here for five years and we cannot leave, and you come from Vienna thinking this is easy?" We go downstairs into the street and run into a Jewish boy, who warns us, that the Gestapo³⁶ will imprison anyone. We are at our wits' end and have no way to know what to do. "Not back to Vienna," I think continuously. Again, we go to the train station. We sit in the restaurant and ask each other "What now?" I am very hot, and I sit and brood. "Come on", I say to Fredl, "let's go out again." We buy a map in the station, and now we see, that Munchengladbach is a town near the border. We are again sitting in a train. In Munchengladbach, we notice a train to the village of Kaldenkirchen. I ask a conductor if this village is near the Dutch border. "Quite near" he answers, grinning.

School children are on the train and we are not especially noticed. I sit and stare out into the darkness, excited as in a movie, and I am inquisitive to know what comes next. An SS man goes through the train. Kaldenkirchen. We depart the train and, collecting all our courage, I speak to the SS man. "We have legal documents to leave Germany", I say to him with all my confidence. He looks at us for a long time and then motions us to come with him. He leads us for twenty minutes to a crossing and through a village. Our nerves are at their utmost tension, because we do not know where he will take us.

Suddenly, we stop in front of a house. A second SS man opens the door and motions us to come inside. In a room there is a third SS man, who studies us with

great interest. A radio and a table with food gives us a comfortable impression. "You would like to go illegally to Holland?" begins the one who opened the door. "Yes", I answer. We are searched and to my big surprise, they do not take our sixty marks³⁷ in silver. At the end of the table, the head of the SS group says, "Boys, all the best. I hope you make it. But, if you return, you will be put into an education camp³⁸ and you will not be able to leave there before you have long white beards. Good luck. Get going." Next, we are standing in a moonlit night and look at each other. "Let's go", I say, and in these words, lies the biggest decision of my eighteen years. Very quickly we throw away the bag with all the food we brought from home. We save only a few cans in our nicker's pockets and start walking.

Soon we leave the small town behind us and are quietly going westward through the fields and forests, towards freedom. Like an omen the moon shines in all its light, and with considerable effort we go through thickets and swamps and ditches. We walk for some hours. Suddenly, we are stuck in a impassable undergrowth of the forest. Now we are fighting with our hands and feet, like we face another enemy. I imagine that the trees are SA people. Now we are finally through and after a short time we come to a black wooden post which is painted white on top. Approximately 20 meters from this post is a dark house. "This must be the border" I whisper to Fredl. Hand in hand we sneak around the house and go down the road. We see a sign and Fredl lifts me up to read it.

"TOEGANG VERBODEN"³⁹ is written on the board, a foreign

³⁷ German currency.

³⁸ An "education" or "training" camp was the ironic synonym for a concentration camp.

³⁹ "No admittance." This sign was written in Dutch, the first Dutch words we have ever seen; we know we are in Holland.

language to us. Relieved, we take a deep breath and are on our way again. Soon we come to a village, which lies in total darkness. At the train station we read the name of the village, Belfeld. As we go over the railroad tracks, we stumble over signal wires; Fredl and I are falling down the embankment. Lost, we look around, but nothing is hurt in this eerie darkness. Soon, we are standing in the middle of a street, which seems to be a main road.

As we walk a few meters, we read, "Six kilometers Venlo, 17 kilometers Roermond"⁴⁰. Undecided, we stand still and look down the street. We hear the sound of an approaching car. We see two headlights and I signal in the middle of the street for the driver to stop. The car does not stop, but races on. We start walking in the direction of Roermond. After we have gone about a kilometer, we notice on our right side a silvery looking flat area, which passes through the fields. "The river Maas", I say in hushed tones to Fredl. All of a sudden, I recall the geography and that it would be better to go in the direction of Venlo. We are very tired, and I feel it difficult to cover the remaining 16 kilometers (10 miles) to Roermond during the night. So, we turn around and walk towards Venlo.

"Tomorrow we must send a telegram home", I say to Fredl, "because it would be a colossal happiness to our parents, knowing that we reached Holland safely." Happy and excited, we start to walk faster. "In Venlo, we have to watch out." I turn around and am confronted by a very bright light, which is blinding. And suddenly, like something shot out of the ground, there are two figures in front of us. Our surprise is indescribable. They wear large helmets, green-grayish uniforms with snow white braids falling from their shoulders, and are carrying pistols. We immediately realize our situation. "Who are you?", one says in

40 Four miles and eleven miles, respectively.

broken German. I feign not to fear, and give Fredl a wink. But the man is insisting, so I start to invent an unconvincing story⁴¹. "We are from Amsterdam and we have visited someone in Belfeld, and we are now on our way to Venlo to go home." As soon as I finished, I realize what a stupid thing I said. Ironically, the border patrollers are laughing at us. "Papers?" one of them asks. I realize now, that it is best, not to answer at all. Slowly, and with heart palpitations, we are led by the two patrollers to a town. I whisper to Fredl that he should hide the German money and his passport in his pants. I do the same. We march for about 45 minutes without stopping, and are wondering what will happen to us.

I have come to the conclusion, that nothing serious is likely to happen to us, and it would be best to speak only the truth. I stop to rest. All of a sudden I take the passport out of my pants and give it to the patrollers. Fredl does the same. "OK, now" one of them says and studies our passports. We have to continue but we do not know of their intended destination.

December 3, 1938

Totally exhausted, we reach a small town around one-thirty in the morning. The border patrolmen knock on a door of a large building. In anticipation, we wait for what happens next. As nobody answers, we go to a different house. There, a man opens a window and talks to the border patrolmen. After a short time, he appears downstairs, greets us politely, and escorts us to another house nearby. As we enter this house, it becomes obvious that we are in a police station. The gentleman seems to be the head of the police of this small town. His sweet smiles are starting to irritate me. In his looks there is an irony, and with a foreign accent, he begins to question us. All of our answers

⁴¹ The story is nonsensical. We speak no Dutch; we are dirty and walk in the middle of the highway, and we are near the German border in the middle of the night.

to his questions are being recorded in a ledger. Again and again he says, "you are lying." After he has questioned us for a long time we were searched. Everything that we have in our possession must be laid on his table. He also asks for my belt, giving me a very uncertain feeling. Slowly, he slams the book closed, gives us a hateful look, and says, "the gentlemen will now go to sleep." While he is saying this, he smiles in an intimidating way, like he is making fun of us. We were led towards the outside, but inside of the exit, we go into a hallway, in which there are many doors, which we immediately recognize as cells of a jail.

I have hardly started to begin to think, when I realize that I am in a cell with the door shut behind me. A small window which is in the door, is opened and the police officer tells me very politely, that we will have hot coffee at 8:00 in the morning. After that, he wishes me a good night. Fredl is pushed into another cell. I hear steps in the distance. We are prisoners.

I stay motionless for a long time, hardly realizing what has happened in the last few hours. A knocking on the wall brings me to reality; I believe it must be Fredl knocking. The wall between our cells must be a meter thick, because the knocking I hear sounds as though from a long distance. I hit my wall very hard with my foot, and receive a return answer. In the cell it is terribly cold and because the window is open, rain from a storm is coming in. A wooden plank bed, a few torn blankets, and several steel rings fastened in the wall is the content of my cell. The window is so high, that I can not reach it, and, besides, there are thick steel bars across it. As I pick up one of the dirty blankets, I see, that in the wooden cot is a hole, under which a bucket is placed. From the bucket comes a terrible smell. I am horrified to think that I have to sleep under these dirty blankets, and I begin to pace up and down, just to stay warm. But as it does no good, I throw a blanket around me and put my hot head on the wet cot.

My excitement is so huge, that even though it is the second night with little sleep, I can not fall

asleep. Later on, I am plagued by uninterrupted thoughts; I see SS people before me going through the forests and the rivers. In front of me is Germany, like a ghost, which reaches over the frontier to get at me. This type of thoughts is undoubtedly due to extreme tiredness and excitement. My future is uncertain: they can send me back and extradite me, or they can leave me in this middle age prison cell. The storm outside continues, madly. Cold raindrops spatter onto my cot and many little streams form under my blanket. Outside, church bells begin to toll the fourth hour in the morning.

This is our destiny. So it is that our people are without a home, without a land, have for two thousand years gone from one land to another, just to save themselves from the devil, called pogrom. These unprotected people are thrown into cells, and they are kicked and martyred. An unprecedented madness arises within me, I feel a compulsion to smash the door, and to emerge from this shameful persecution of the Jewish people, going on for hundreds of years. Why did they put me in here? What have I done wrong? That, I ask myself over and over again. Fleeing from one enemy, I am imprisoned by another. I can not comprehend all of this. Slowly I start to regret our adventure. I see my room at home and my bed, which is now empty. Always new pictures come within my mind, and above all, the question "Why did I leave?" But I can not give myself an answer. Slowly I begin to cry. Slowly the first rays of a new day to enter my cell. Outside, bells are ringing and a dog is barking.

The unkindly cold does not let me lay down; even though terribly tired and exhausted, I resume my pacing. Uninterrupted, I try to calm myself, calling myself a coward. I knocked on the wall, but there is no answer. In the meantime, it is daylight, and I can see a church steeple and clock through my window. It is 7:00 in the morning. The cold is unbearable and my whole body is stiff. I start to exercise and to jump up and down, just to have something to do. My teeth are chattering.

All of a sudden, I notice a button to push by the door. I start right away pushing the button, and,

minutes later, I hear footsteps coming towards me. The little door is opened and a female voice says, "Who barks?" At first, I am going to say, that I am not a dog, but I realize immediately, that "barking" could mean "ringing a bell" in Dutch. I am told that the police officer is coming in at 8:00 AM, and the little trap door is closed. I try for about an hour to get warm, and finally see the key in the lock turning. I am happy to finally leave this hole from the middle-ages.

As I stand outside my cell, the door to Fredl's cell is opened. I will never forget the look on his face. Tired and dirty, his pants in one hand, he fearfully looks around. We are led into a room, where we immediately run to a warm stove. Soon we are offered a piece of black bread and a cup of gray looking warm water which they referred to as coffee. After we warm ourselves a little, we are questioned again. I try everything, but we are told that we were to be sent back to Germany. We become totally confused, and beg the officer not to send us back to Germany, surely to a concentration camp. Finally the officer promises to telephone his superior at the Ministry in Den Haag⁴². As soon as we are warm again, we are led down the hall to the well-known cell doors. I plead to please put us in one cell together, which is flatly denied.

Disappointedly, we again enter our cells and start to fight the cold. Many times I beg to let us sit by the stove, but to no avail. I ask myself continually how something like this can possibly happen in a democratic state. We run away to a free country in search of freedom, but for the time being, we are in a prison cell. To tell about the hours until noon is tiring. Again, I sit on the cot and again I come down. Up and down. But, I still have hopes, although I am a fool to still believe in mankind and freedom.

At one o'clock we were asked if we would like to eat. I said yes, just for the likelihood of returning

⁴² The Hague; "Den Hague" is the center of Dutch Government.

to the warm room. But as soon as we were taken there, we were told that no food was available. We only had a cup of the lukewarm gray water, which the woman calls coffee. As we were sitting and talking about the situation, in the next room the police inspector begins to sing and whistle a song, which we know very well. He whistles the Horst Wessel song⁴³. Now I realize what is going on here. Shortly thereafter, he comes smiling and explains to us, that he had tried everything in pleading for us with the Ministry; but he has no success and we have to go this evening to Germany. This news gives us a virtual death-blow. They give us a special privilege, an extra half-hour by the stove.

The police officer had left, and we were now sitting in the room with a secretary. He speaks a little German and tells us in a low voice to try to cross the Dutch border again, only further to the south. He points to a map on the wall. I immediately move to that map and try with all my might to memorize it. After a short time, we are again led back to our cells. Outside it had started to get dark, and still the raindrops keep falling through the window onto the cold stone floor of the cell. It seems as if the skies are crying with us. In the evening hours at dusk, I see fantasy pictures; such as coming home to Vienna, and the despair of the whole predicament.

I am not able to describe the following hours. Sometime, I see us being stopped by Gestapo, and brought into a concentration camp. I again relive all the ugliness from the past month. It is getting darker and darker, until the cell is enveloped in total darkness. All of a sudden, I am shaken and brought to the police room, where Fredl already stands near the

⁴³ The Horst Wessel song was a very popular combat song in Nazi Germany. Horst Wessel was an SA trooper shot down in the 1930's by communists. It is a highly aggressive song ("....wait till the blood of the Jews spouts from the knife"), and nearly always was chanted together with the national hymn. By whistling this well-known song, the officer was in effect explaining his animosity towards us.

stove. The same two border patrolmen, which captured us yesterday, are standing at attention. The main officer writes something into our passports. Our belongings are given back to us and we go outside into the dark night. In the meantime, the rain has subsided. Large deep puddles are in the streets and a noisy cart comes towards us. Like the day before, we go on, the two soldiers keeping us in their control. It must have been 15 minutes, when we come out of the woods to an open street. At the edge of the forest, stands a black wooden block which is painted white on top. We are again on the Holland-Germany border. It becomes clear that we are being expelled. "Over there is Kaldenkirchen. Go straight ahead. Good night." We stay still and look to the lights of the town Kaldenkirchen. "Auf Wiedersehen", I say. "No Auf Wiedersehen, says one of the patrolmen, "Adieu."⁴⁴ "Auf Wiedersehen in a free Holland", I answer as we start along a small trail.

In the distance we see silhouettes of the two border patrolmen, watching us closely. After we go a little while in the open field, we come to a large hedge row. All of a sudden we instinctively and simultaneously vanish into the hedges. We know, without saying one word to each other there is no return to Germany, no return into a prison cell, into the land of the devils. We are out of Germany, and there is no way back. Quickly we scramble into the hedges and wait. All our fear is now gone as we are no longer guarded; we are again free and must use care to not again lose this freedom. Fifteen minutes pass, then a half-hour. Very quietly we sit down on the damp earth between the wet hedges. I take out my passport and light a match to see what they have written at the police station. "TOEGANG GEWEIGERD, Tegelen, 3 December, 1938" it says⁴⁵. It is now 9:00 in the evening

⁴⁴ "Auf Wiedersehen" means, "see you again". "Adieu" means, "goodbye". They did not wish to see us again.

⁴⁵ "Entrance Denied"; Tegelen is the small village where we were imprisoned.

when we slowly come out of the hedges. Again it starts to rain lightly.

We begin to fight against the storm, the rain, and the wetness. We avoid the road zigzag through fields in the direction of Holland. After a short time we are totally drenched. Out of breath, we walk on and many times sink up to our knees in mud. Soon we see a street, on which we occasionally see bicycle traffic. Being cautious, we begin to hide ourselves from every ray of light. Up and down, up and down, we move ever so carefully. After we cover a little more distance, we come into a little village and stay next to a fence. After we jump over this fence, we find ourselves in a garden. Further on there is a house with lights visible through the windows. We must get through this light unnoticed because there is no other way to pass. First I run, then Fredl. Through the window we see shadows of people; right away we jump over another fence and are now on a broad asphalt street. Slowly and happily we go on with no knowledge about the direction, or without knowing what village we are in. Finally, I can not tolerate the uncertainty and I knock on the door of a house. First, it is quiet, then I hear steps, and the door opens.

"Heil Hitler" a young man says, "What do you want?" "Where is the Dutch border please?", I ask in a low voice. The door is slammed into our faces. The first moment I am so startled, so unbelieving, that I can not move. I am quite sure we are back again in Kaldenkirchen. The "Heil Hitler" captures my senses and I totally fall apart. We are totally exhausted and drained of emotion and strength. "It does not matter where we go to", I say to Fredl, "let's go this way. If we come to Holland, fine; if not, we will go back to Vienna." The third night without sleep, the hunger, and the crushing disappointment brings us to this conclusion. Come what may, we are going straight ahead. So again we start to wander, on a small trail which would lead us either to freedom or again to Germany and a prison cell. We walk approximately 10 minutes, as the trail leads us into a thick pine

forest. We try to consistently follow a direction by the light of a veiled moon. We go further into the unknown continuing through the dark forest. Our socks and clothing are totally soggy, and with each step, water squeezes out of our shoes. We have given up our hope to reach Holland, but we continue on through the forest, as though being driven by an unknown force. Suddenly, we notice a sign board. As Fredl lifts me up, I can read what is written there: "500 meters to the Reich's border." Our happiness has no borders; happily and with new energy we run further and further through the forest towards the border.

While running, I stumbled over a pole, and as I look closer I notice that there is a golden ring painted on the top. It marks the demarcation of the German Reich border. In front of us, we notice a clearing and soon we find ourselves in an open area. Totally surprised, we look around, and can not believe our eyes. We are standing on exactly the same spot we stood on the day before yesterday! There is the black wooden post with the white cap, over there the dark house, and the street, which leads to Belfeld. The same as the day before yesterday, we quietly sneak around the house. But this day, we are wiser.

We do not go onto the street, but make our way through the fields, walking bent over or crawling so as to not attract any attention. As we move along like this, I realize that we face perhaps insurmountable difficulties. We have no Dutch money, no knowledge of the area, no normal clothing, we are only surrounded by danger. There is only one possibility, namely, to find people where we can rest and who may show us the way. This is the third night with virtually no sleep, but we crawl on, slowly, totally exhausted. I remember that on this street is a windmill; we go in that direction. Above the entrance of the mill is a plaque which shows a family coat of arms and an inscription. It could be a house for the border patrol. I hear footsteps near the door. We quickly hide, and, grabbing Fredl, we head down the street. Behind us, we hear the noise of a wagon. Very quickly, we lay flat in the field, as a small carriage passes. Only as we lose sight of the carriage we again move, crawling in ankle deep mud,

through cultivated land. It becomes clear that it is impossible for us to go further during this night; and we decide to go to one of the farm houses that we can see. Approximately 100 meters away stands a farm building, out in the open field. A few windows are lighted. Quickly we jump over cabbage and other plants and, with pounding hearts, stop in front of the door. After ringing the bell, we hear footsteps. An elderly lady opens the door and looks at us in great surprise. I say, "We would like to rest; may we come in?" Even though she seems not to understand my German, she quickly lets us inside. With dripping clothes, torn and dirty, we stand in a kitchen, with the farmer and his wife and six children looking at us in astonishment. Their faces show that they feel sadness for us even though they do not understand us.

They can almost gather what is going on with us. A big man enters the room wearing wooden shoes. He also looks at us in surprise, and suddenly starts to talk in German (later we learn he is a neighboring farmer, and a German by origin). After we take off our coats, we are escorted into another room. In the whole house, there is a typical smell of a farm. The woman sits with her sewing and every once in a while looks at us with a questioning stare. At the same time the farmer and children look at us like creatures from another planet. We are sitting beside the heating stove bare footed, and our clothes are hanging around to dry; from a big jar, we are invited to pour ourselves some coffee. The German speaking man, the neighbor of the farmer, had settled himself and starts talking to us.

The whole surrounding gives us a peaceful and friendly impression. There is a softly ticking clock on the wall, an oil lamp on the table, and pictures of the family on a sideboard. Soon we realize that we have found people who would like to help us. After we tell them a lot about ourselves, the German speaking farmer questions us, wondering how we can go on. Because today is Saturday, we have to start during the night and go on. We admit that our biggest problem of the moment is the lack of Dutch money. For a long time the farmers debate, what they can give us for our

German marks. It seems as if they cannot reach a conclusion. The German farmer explains to us which route we should follow. At 11:00 this evening we should be at a boat dock on the Maas River⁴⁶, because at that time the ferry leaves for the last time of the day to go to the other side. We must be careful as the ferry boat is under constant military surveillance to prevent refugees from attempting to cross the river. Getting off at the other side we should walk to the nearest train station. He explains exactly how to get to the ferry at Steyl⁴⁷ and further on to the train station at the town of Weert. Because the route is quite complicated, we decide, that I will remember the route to Steyl and Fredl the way to Weert.

Comfortably, I move my feet in front of the warm stove. Several hours my feet have been in wet socks, and it would be a surprise if neither of us catches a cold. The clock on the wall shows 10:00. Ghost-like shadows are wandering along the wall of the room. We sit in this living room quietly, considering what the next few hours might bring. The woman says over and over again, "Without papers", and shakes her head. She evidently means, that without papers or valid visas we cannot proceed very far. Very slowly we try to put on our damp socks. We almost cannot get into our shoes. Again, we speak about the money. After several minutes of thinking, the farmer gives us a few banknotes and four small pieces of Dutch currency. We place 53 German marks in silver on the table. The German-speaking man promises to guide us to his place⁴⁸ which

⁴⁶ The Maas River runs parallel to the Dutch-German border for a great distance, serving as a barrier to prevent illegal immigration. Once on the opposite side, control of people movements is much more difficult.

⁴⁷ Steyl is a small Dutch town on the east bank of the Maas river where the ferry docks.

⁴⁸ We are in Holland at this time; but the German border is less than 100 meters away.

is on the way to the ferry boat. It give us a good feeling, that we will not have to go alone into the night. In the kitchen we pick up our coats, and thank every one of the family . Without saying anything else, everyone having his own thoughts, we go outside.

On the way the farmer again and again tells us about our route so that we do not forget. After a short time we come to his house. He motions us to wait, then brings us each a pair of very thick black socks. With many thanks we accept this present. I get the impression that this person has done a good deed for us, almost like he feels his brothers on the other side have done wrong. For five more minutes he walks with us to be sure we get on the right trail, Thankfully, we shake his hand. We do not know what his name is, and he does not know our names. He is a human being extending help, whom we met in our dire need. The Dutch farm family and this German farmer will always be remembered with gratitude.

Happily, we march into Holland, full of hope to finally reach our goal. Even though we are dead tired, we continue very fast. All of our tiredness is gone; it means now more than ever we must keep our nerves in check to reach freedom. Soon, we see lights before us and again we seem to be on the same street, on which we were captured yesterday. But, we have learned from our mistake. As soon we see a light coming towards us, we hide immediately in the bushes. A car is coming close. Hurriedly we jump over a fence, and roll down a steep embankment. We even are able to laugh a little. We end up in a dark alley and see the boat dock before us; we hear the water splashing on the shore.

Uncertainly, we walk to the edge and we see a boat docked there. Because we do not see a ferry boat anyplace, I go up onto the boat and stomp my feet on its' metal deck. Only later, do I realize what a careless mistake this could be. Right away, I hear heavy footsteps approaching. A man with a Captain's cap and a wild beard addresses me in a sharp, unpleasant voice. He seems to understand a little German. I ask, "How do we get to the to the other side?" He points his finger upstream. In the meantime, Fredl comes closer. Now the man seems to take

more interest in us.

"Ah, German refugees", he says showing surprise, and returns quickly into the boat's interior. Totally flabbergasted, we stay there on top of the boat.

After a short time the Captain reappears and discusses a plan with us. Approximately 200 meters up the river, he points to a green light--the ferry, which is our only hope to cross the river. We want to go on as soon as possible, but he tells us that the boat dock is guarded day and night. All our hopes are dashed; disappointedly, we stare at the green light across the river. How can we cross this river in the dark? The Captain presents a plan to us, using half Dutch and half German languages. He will try to divert the guards' attention briefly and create an opportunity for us to board the ferry. He tells us to wait and hurries on. With very uncertain feelings we stay behind. Will this man be helping us or will he tell the guard about us? Only for seconds, I wonder out loud, "Should we run"? but then we decide, "No, we must play our last card now." We have to believe that this man is trying to help us.

We can see his dark silhouette walking towards the green light. On the edge of the river, there is a monastery and church surrounded by a tall stone wall. Our nerves are at the point of breaking. All our hope and fear is mixed with this anticipation and waiting. Now we see the Captain on a little hill, just in front of the church. He stands in some rays of light, and seems to signal us to come. The bells of the church ring eleven times. The waves of the Maas River rush against the shore. He appears like a ghost standing on the little hill as we rush towards him. It is a picture that we will never forget. What are we running to? To the ferry? Or to the arms of the border patrol, possibly hiding behind the stone wall? Our hearts are in our throats. Finally, we are there; we are standing on a large wooden dock. A man is turning a wheel, another one with wooden shoes pushes a bicycle onto the ferry boat. All of a sudden, the ropes tying the ferry to the shore are undone, other ropes are being pulled, the motor starts up; all of this takes place within seconds. We are going, we are going

towards the other side of the Maas.

Now he removes his cap and waves. The church bells are ringing out the end of the hour. The river ripples softly. We are going, we are going to the other side of the Maas River! Soon, the ferry docks, and our hearts are jubilant when we disembark and stand on the earth beneath us. The man with the bicycle understands German very well, and as soon as he realizes that we are fugitives, he promises to escort us to the next town.

Only once, I turn around and look back; for one more time I see the church, with the little hill, the unforgettable Captain, and the green light. A very large obstacle is now behind us, but how many obstacles do we have before us?

Momentarily, however, we hike with a bit of happiness with the man guiding us. He also explains to us the road we have to take to the next train station, but warns again and again to watch for frequent patrols. Soon we reach a town, and as our man shows us the crossing, and the winding of the streets, he shakes our hands with much feeling. Slowly, we go along on the inside of the street. After about ten minutes a bicyclist passes us rapidly. Again we hide behind a dam, but the man on the bicycle stops very close in front of us and cuts us off. Very cautiously, I peek out and notice our guide. Still somewhat shocked and uncertain we come out of our hiding place. Our guide praises us for being careful, and hands us a package of bread with cheese which he had forgotten to give us. For the second time, we say goodbye to our helper. We walk straight ahead on a main road, faster and faster, heading inland.

December 4, 1938

This is the most terrible night in my life, so far. Will I ever forget it? Did I sacrifice everything during this long night? Thirty-five kilometers (21 miles) in one night, the third night without sleep, and all the time under the highest tension and in danger. I ask myself, "Can someone describe this journey into darkness we have taken?";

we can only search for words to describe what we feel, but the reality is a thousand times worse. What we really went through, I will never be able to describe. We march on the street, counting mile, after mile, after mile. Every 10 minutes we have to hide ourselves in the ditches along the street; we are frequently up and down in order to hide.

The socks which we had not been able to change yet are soaking wet, our shoes are soft with water, and our coats are very dirty. Our eyes are half open, and so we go on, hour after hour, without seeing a train station before us. We feel like Ahasver, a legendary Jew who walks around eternally⁴⁹. Soon, I must sit down at a kilometer marker. Fredl has to shake me, because I fall asleep right away. Suddenly, I see two lights which are coming towards us. No sooner do we hide behind a tree, which only partially covers us, a patrol drives by. Unwisely, I move my head to look but they do not notice us. Somewhat shaken, we go on. Later we pass a haystack near a farmhouse. Right away we nestle into the wet straw to change our socks. It feels so good to have a pair of dry socks on our feet again. The German farmer had told us that, at a certain point, we have to go another 20 kilometers to Weert, but no place do we see the name of that town or rails leading to a train station. On each direction marker, I climb up, to read the names of towns and villages. Many times we try to guess our direction by the position of stars, but nowhere do we see or hear a train.

The street goes on and on and we walk and walk. It is 2:00 in the morning, and then it is 3:00 **and then** almost 4:00. The street goes on and on, but we don't see Weert or any other town. I am so exhausted that I lay my head on Fredl's shoulder and fall asleep. Sometimes for as long as 15 minutes I walk in a kind of sleep and wake myself. Still, we have to throw

⁴⁹ Ahasver closed his door to Jesus, who was carrying the cross on his shoulder, and asked for a short rest; therefore, Ahasver will walk around until Jesus returns to earth.

ourselves in the ditches if we believe there is danger. Doesn't this night of torture ever end?

As I again fall asleep on Fredl's shoulder he suddenly awakens me and gives me a punch. Surprised, we listen into the night. Yes, there in front of us, and it must be within reach; we hear sounds like a moving train, a train on tracks. Tracks lead to a train station. So, we walk faster and are convinced, that the river Maas must be about 20 kilometers behind us. All of a sudden, we hear more noises, now clearer, but coming from a different direction. We leave the street and go onto a smaller pathway in order to hear the sounds better. After walking 10 minutes, we come before a mill with a water wheel. Here is the sound we heard. Terribly disappointed, we go back onto the main street.

An icy cold has now set in. We are shaking from the cold, but we drag ourselves further. But now? Yes, this is very clearly the sound of a locomotive, but from faraway. With renewed drive, we drag ourselves on, because we are no longer really walking. We suddenly freeze in our tracks. Maybe it is only a fantasy, being too tired, which is playing a trick on our overheated and tired souls. About 100 meters before us, something with a light which flashes red and white, goes up before us. This monster, or whatever it is, suddenly stays still and the lights go out. Shocked and not able to focus, we stand still and cannot take another step. We stay there for a few minutes unable to move. But suddenly, the monster lights up again, comes down and we understand. The "monster" is a railroad crossing gate with red and white lights, where train tracks crossed the road. The three nights without sleep, the march in the rain, mud and cold, has seriously affected our thinking powers. Even though we now know what the monster is, we still are frightened, so that we move very slowly towards it.

Close to the street crossing stands a train building which houses machinery. Quickly, we rush by, stumble over a fence, a dog barks, and we jump over another fence and run along the train tracks. After a short run, I had to sit down on a fallen tree because I can not go on. Right away, I fall asleep. Fredl

awakens me and we listen carefully into the night. We hear a sound, as if a train goes over a long iron bridge. Slowly we go on. Now we hear clearly the sounds of an approaching train on the tracks. Two big lights go by with enormous speed, a train carrying freight. After a short time, we hear again the same noise, but this time we are very disappointed. The train goes over a bridge. We start to think logically. Back in Vienna, I had looked at a map. There was only one river here- the Maas. So it could only be a bridge crossing the Maas. But we know we are already across the Maas.

Now we begin to realize that the whole night long we have walked in a circle. This realization startles us since we know that all the bridges are guarded. We are actually headed again in the direction of the German border. We quickly decide to turn around and go in the opposite direction towards the next train station. Soon we are beside a signal box and as we try to go by it, someone opens a door and a bright light plays over us. We press ourselves against a wall and begin to run. Soon we are out of danger and march along the tracks with renewed effort.

After a few miles, it starts slowly to get light. We can at least make out the land in front of us. All our tiredness is gone and we only feel very, very cold, so we walk even faster. It is around 6:00 AM, then 7:00, and then 8:00, and there is full daylight. But a train station is nowhere to be seen. Like an enormous veil, fog settles on the fields. Here and there is a farmhouse or a windmill. There is an almost scary quietness, the quietness of a Sunday morning.

A new day has begun, and a terrible night lay behind us. Mile after mile, we walk along the tracks. The sun is getting higher; from time to time a train passes by us. At about 10:00 we see a station before us. We enter the small building and are told, that no trains stop here, trains would only stop at Weert, 8 kilometers (5 miles) down the track. We rest only a short time and then go on. After a while we see a large town ahead. The tracks split, and we leave the tracks to go onto a street. It is Sunday, and lot of people are on the street; everyone looks at us. We

try to brush off our coats as well as we can. I stuff my cap in my pants and throw the dirty gloves away. At exactly 12:00 noon we arrived at the train station in Weert, and with our Dutch money, we buy two tickets to Amsterdam. Because the train will not leave until 1:00, we go into a coffee house close by. The waiter looks us over in a peculiar way, and we order a breakfast in German. Right away, we wolf down the cheese sandwiches because we had not eaten in many hours; our stomachs are totally empty. After a short time, a police officer comes in, so we pay very quickly and leave the restaurant. As I turn around at the door, I notice the wet footprints which we had left on the floor. At the train station we hide in a men's room and wait for the train.

After a short time, a modern train comes into the station. First, we are hesitant to enter the train, as the seats are covered with beautiful leather, but enter we do. The worst seems to be behind us. We lean back very tired, and watch the passing views of Holland through the window. Now comes the big question. What will await us in Amsterdam? Who will take care of us? These questions will not leave us. We have gone through the worst, and it is behind us, but what is to come next? The new landscape takes us away from our thoughts a little bit. Many times we cross over bridges and notice small and large ships. Water seems to be the predominate portion of the land. In the train station of Utrecht, we see out the window a black man, who is dressed in clothing of various colors. Half an hour after having passed Utrecht, we are again going through the outskirts of a large town. Shortly then, we slowly enter a large train hall, the suburban station of Amsterdam. Because our tickets are marked "Main Station" we stay on the train. Our excitement reaches a high point; excitedly, we fidget in our seats. The picture of the town, the noise, the unknown, the tiredness- all seem to come down on us at one time. We reach the Main Station of Amsterdam, depart from the train, and stand looking in the enormous station hall.

Hesitantly, we go with the mass of people to reach the exit of the train station. All of a sudden a

porter with a white jacket comes towards us very nonchalantly and says to us, "Schalom aleichem"⁵⁰, "The committee for Jewish refugees is located at s'Gravenhekje 7."⁵¹ I know we look at him, like you might stare at an angel coming down from heaven. At first we are so surprised, that we can not speak at all. After we gather our thoughts a bit, we ask for specific directions to the Jewish headquarter and thank him very much for his help. Happily, and excited we leave the train station. The train travel, the scenery, and everything had already made an impression on us, but the new scenes of the city are even more impressive.

Before us lay a pier with numerous ships, an enormous draw bridge, noise, people, sirens, street cars, and car horns. A little frightened, we make our way through the mass. After many times of stopping and asking we arrive at the Committee. Here we learn of new surprises.

The registration of refugees seems to be a matter of routine. Right away we receive a number and are asked to sit down and wait for our turn. All of a sudden, I notice Fred Schwarz who had left Vienna a few days before us. We greet each other with enthusiasm and he gives us an address of a boarding house, which we should mention when registered by one of the

⁵⁰ This is the old Jewish greeting, meaning "Peace be with you." With this greeting, volunteers dressed as porters identified themselves as Jews and helpers. Only if one has been registered at the Jewish committee for refugees is one safe. Police are looking constantly in train stations for unregistered refugees. If caught, they could send you back to Germany after arrival in Amsterdam. These Jewish volunteers risked themselves to warn newly arriving refugees of this danger.

⁵¹ Literally, "the Count's port." This is the name of a small street in the center of Amsterdam, where the Jewish Committee had its' headquarter. Pronunciation of this name is nearly impossible unless one is familiar with the Dutch language.

committee members. We are called to a desk, to show our passports and to receive a letter, with which we have to report the next day at the Amsterdam Main Police Office. In another room we receive a voucher for the boarding house Fred has mentioned. A few minutes later we sit with Fred as free men in a tram, on our way to our future home. We are still dizzy and dead tired, listening only with half an ear to all the information Fred gives us. It seems that the Committee is well organized and cares well for the refugees.

After a short ride we leave the tram at the van Woustraat, a broad street with nice houses. Soon we stand before Lola's Lunchroom. The reception is very friendly and we are introduced to a number of other refugees, while one of the owner's of the lunchroom brings a nice meal to our table. Quite a number of our comrades sit around our table and soon the whole room knows about our adventures during the last few days. After we have gulped down our food, the great moment comes- a telephone call to our parents in Vienna. Everybody in the room stays around us. Our parents are so excited, that they nearly cannot speak. Only at this moment I realize that I am hardly able to stay on my feet; the same is the case with Fredl. The soles of our feet are covered with blisters, and our ankles are swollen. Shortly after our telephone conversations we are shown the way to our guest house, where we will sleep; we stumble over the street with great difficulty.

The elderly Jewish couple, who has prepared a room for us, do not speak one word of German, but both welcome us warmly with gestures. We cannot communicate, as we would wish, but the woman wants to know why we undertook such efforts to reach Holland. We try to tell them by gesture and some Yiddish words what had happened in Austria. After a while, we understood the woman to say to her husband: "I believe we should show the boys their bedroom, since they are so dead tired their fantasies are running away with them."⁵² We have to share a bed today, but tomorrow they

⁵² In recent decennia, I have often quoted this remark. It explains, in my opinion, why nearly 80% of Dutch Jews were deported to death camps. We had learned first hand

will provide a second bed for us. We take off our wet and dirty clothes, and are elated to get rid of our soaked and torn shoes. We lie down but are not able to sleep. The overfatigue and all the experiences of the last few days are too overwhelming. Outside, we hear the bells of trams, and all the other street noises. I close my eyes and imagine that this is my bed at home. Only then I fall into a deep and nearly unconscious sleep.

December 5, 1938

Still tired and broken we wake up around 10:00 AM. After washing at a water tap above a small sink, we put on our clothes, which our landlady had dried and even repaired a bit. With great difficulty we put on our torn shoes and walk over to the nearby lunchroom. The breakfast is excellent and we can eat as much as we want. Later we go to the police office as we were told yesterday. The officials are friendly and our data are registered. We receive a special card and are told to report at the police office twice a week. Now we have fulfilled our required duties. After lunch we take a tram through beautiful Amsterdam and feel like tourists on a sight-seeing tour. We spend a very nice day and late in the evening fall totally exhausted into our beds.

December 6, 1938

After days of tremendous effort and desperation there is again some hope in our lives. We are young and there is a whole life before us. Interrupted only by meals and sleeping, we try to spend our days as pleasantly as possible. Although we have only been in Amsterdam for three days, we begin to realize what is going on about us. We are very much impressed about the way the Jewish committee cares for us. Again we wake up only around 10 AM. We both feel pain all over our bodies. Our feet remain swollen and we feel more

what the Nazi's were able to do, but the majority of Dutch Jews had not seen and could not comprehend these cruelties.

exhausted than during the previous days when we lived in a kind of euphoria. After breakfast we decide to go to a public bath. With our special card, we receive a 50% reduction in the fee. The feeling of being able to stay under a hot shower for as long as desired is difficult to describe. Along with the water and dirt going down the drain, it is also as if the past is washed away and we emerge from the bathhouse as though reborn.

After lunch, friends are taking us to the "house of the German refugees." While there we receive another in our growing list of pleasant surprises. We receive a membership card and go to a nice library in the large building. Until 5 PM we read foreign newspapers and then walk over to the cafeteria, where refugees can order coffee and cake for only 3 Dutch cents. We sit at a table, like human beings again, which gives us a very happy feeling. Nobody is coming for us to throw us into a prison cell, nobody is going to offend us only because we were born as Jews, no uniform is going to frighten us. We intend to return to this home as frequently as possible. In the evening we walk with friends through downtown Amsterdam, and admire the night life.

December 7, 1938

Today we spend nearly all day at the office of the Jewish committee, where we received pocket money and vouchers to buy clothes and, above all, shoes. We go proudly into town to the most beautiful shops and purchase shoes, shirts, socks, and pajamas. In the evening our landlady and her husband invite us for dinner. The lady serves an excellent meal and we do not find enough words, certainly not in Dutch, to thank them. After the meal we listen to a news broadcast from the Reichssender Vienna⁵³. It gives us a strange feeling. Here we are in free Holland listening to Radio Vienna. We hear about the government implementing all kinds of measures against Jews, which is very

disturbing. At the same time, it is satisfying to no longer feel afraid because of these unpleasant announcements.

December 8, 1938

Today I receive the first letter from home. My parents are very happy to know that I am safe in Amsterdam. I will try to keep this letter. In the evening we were invited to the home of one of the richest men in the city. His daughter is a member of Makkabi, and the meetings of her group are held in her father's magnificent mansion. The family is very kind and promises to help us if and when necessary.

December 10, 1938

One day passes the other and we already have a certain routine how to spend our day. In the morning we go to the police office or to the office of the Jewish committee. In the afternoon, we regularly visit the house of the German refugees, and the evenings we spend in town. I ask myself, "How long can this go on?" Such a period of happiness cannot go on forever; or can it? But what is going to change? For tomorrow, I have been invited to Scheveningen, the seaside resort of The Hague, where a family I know from Vienna lives. I am looking forward to this trip.

December 11, 1938

I arise early to be on time for the bus to The Hague. The trip on an excellent highway is beautiful, and I enjoy the landscape. Soon we arrive in the town where the Dutch government has its' headquarters. Moving to a tram, I continue on my way to Scheveningen. The Hague is a beautiful town with many cottages; the cleanliness is everywhere and amazing. After about 30 minutes, I arrive at the residence of my friends. They are curious, so I spend time telling of the last months in Vienna, and of our experiences during the recent weeks. Then the daughter of the home suggests we take a walk to the sea, only a few minutes away. I first see the Grand Hotel as we climbed a hill: it is an impressive building. From the top of the hill, I see the sea for the first time in my life. I am speechless

for a few minutes, as one can only see water until it meets the horizon. Although it is December, the sun warms us in spite of the strong wind. We walk along the promenade. Although the tourist season is over, we see cars from many countries. A long pier runs out into the water. At the end of the pier is a coffeehouse.

I do not know what to admire first, the endless stretch of sand, the millions of shells, or the eternal crash of the waves upon the beach. Everything is new and surprising to me. After dinner we again walk out to the sea. It is now at high tide, and large waves beat against the promenade wall. Near the seaside resort of Scheveningen is a fishing village, where celebrations are underway. The streets are decorated with fishing nets and with orange flags. In the harbor are numerous boats and ferries, all decorated in festive colors.

It is difficult for me to say goodbye in the evening to these scenes and to my friends. I arrive in Amsterdam in the middle of the night, and fall into my bed, my mind spinning with the wonderful impressions of the long day. I dream of home, but again and again, I see stretches of water and high waves.

December 14, 1938

New refugees arrive every day, so their number in Amsterdam increases rapidly. We spend many evenings at the Makkabi facilities. During the last few days we encounter a new enemy--the cold. In the evening we are not able to fall asleep easily, as our beds are very cold. In the morning the water in the basin is frozen. We run to the lunchroom and are happy to be greeted by the warmth of the heating stove. Today it is nearly 10 degrees F.

December 17, 1938

The cold becomes very uncomfortable. Our landlady provides us with an oil heater. The famous canals of Amsterdam are frozen solid.

December 18, 1938

It had been a long time, so today we visited a cinema. We recall numerous Sunday afternoons in Vienna, when we enjoyed the films. In the evening, we are invited to sit with our landlady in their warm room; we stay until very late. I have applied for a place to go on Hachshara⁵⁴, and I sincerely hope that it will be realized in the coming year.

December 19, 1938

A day I will never forget.....

At 7:30 AM I am awake and go down to see if mail I have been expecting is there. Fredl is still asleep. Shivering, I put on my clothes and go downstairs into the cold December morning. The whole town is enveloped in fog, which moves around due to strong wind. Street lamps are still lighted, but towards the east the new day is arriving. Covered by my thin raincoat, I walk quickly to our lunchroom. The warm stove is the first pleasure of the day. A friend mentions that he had received a postal card this morning, asking him to come to the main police office. I sit down for my breakfast. Soon there are more of our refugee friends gathering, who had also received the invitation to come to the police office. Now I become curious, although one of the restaurant owners believes that this is no more than a routine control measure. However, I have an unpleasant feeling about this, and quickly walk home. In our mailbox are two of these cards, for Fredl and myself.

Around 10:00 AM we approach the police headquarters. In a nearby small street, a number of buses are lined up, which again gives me an uncomfortable feeling. From all directions men with a card in their hands enter the building. In a broad corridor we join a few hundred men, waiting before us. The police officers are kind and have smiles on their faces. Newcomers fill the corridor behind us. An elderly gentleman remembers that he has forgotten to buy some cigars and wants to leave the building. A

police officer very politely tells him that to leave is not possible. Embarrassed, I look at Fredl, who only shakes his head. We have been captured again.

Ten by ten, the men are led to various rooms on the first floor. "We are being put into a camp",- "We are going back to Germany",- "War",- "Who knows what has happened here?" Desperate questions are on everyone's lips. Rumors are going through the mass of people in hushed voices. Everyone feels very uneasy and would like to be next in order to see what is going on. Suddenly, a door very close to me is opened and a man shouts, "Anyone under 30 years." Already we are being pushed.

At several tables officials are seated. We have to talk to each, one after another. The first person stands in front of a table and his pockets and body are searched. Now we know what is going on! The men stand motionless, their faces have turned white, and the realism of the moment is not being fathomed. Now it is my turn. I am very excited and can hardly control myself. The official searches my pockets. "Do you have a knife?" he yells at me. "I, I, don't know," I stutter. He takes my knife from my pocket and puts it on the table. Then he searches me again, and gives me a push to go on. Now it is Fredl's turn. "Name, date of birth," yells an official; "Passport, papers," yells the next one. And so it goes on. Fredl now stands beside me and we are taken into another room. Here we meet friends from our lunchroom. Every 10 minutes, 10 to 20 people are called outside. The people who have been up here a little longer think that we are to be put into a camp. Others mention Germany. Everyone is sitting like on a pin cushion. All the men look at each other like cattle in a feed lot, the blood drained out of their faces .

"Kampelmacher, Erwin; Kamiel, Alfred..." With a sudden jerk, I jump up and push myself towards the door. Again, we must stand in line one by one. In front and behind us are policemen who put us into an enclosed yard. There are already men waiting and there are several police officials. The door to the yard is closed behind us. The officials tell us that we are to be put into a camp with central heating, a coffee house

and movies. Several do not believe this, others do. Everyone is given a cup of coffee. The hot liquid gives us a little strength and all too happily we hear the official's words. Still new men are coming into the yard. Suddenly, the door is opened, and a command is given. "Start to get in line two by two. Hold your passport in your hand." Erect, the front line stands. An official with a large basket gives everyone two sandwiches. "Turn right, march." And so we march out of the police yard.

Forty of us have to go into bus number 6. One by one, we are pushed into the bus. "Start." Bus number 6 takes off. Fredl and I look at each other. Painfully, I try to gather my thoughts. A policeman sits in front and one is in the rear of the bus. We are going through Amsterdam- and we say "goodbye." My brain is numb. I cannot fathom, what has taken place the last few hours. Some men are laughing, others sing, some have tears in their eyes, some are deep in thought.

We are now entering the suburbs of Amsterdam and are soon on a highway. We slowly notice that we are going east. Every once in a while, we ask one of the officials, "Where are we going?" The only answer we get is a shrug of their shoulders. Everything is now very quiet inside the bus, only here and there are two men talking together. We already have been driving nearly two hours- always towards the east. Some men are standing or moving because of the cold and nervousness. A few have to go outside so the bus stops. One of the policemen stands outside and watches each man empty his bladder; only one is allowed outside the bus at a time. Again and again, we read the signs on the highway and look at a compass, which someone has with him. No doubt, we are driving already six hours straight ahead towards the east. Our despair grows from minute to minute. Only a few truly think that we will go into a camp. Stubbornly, the guards refuse to give us any information. It is 2:00, 3:00, 4:00, 5:00 PM and bus number 6 keeps going straight ahead on this long highway, towards the east, towards Germany. In the bus, it is unbearably quiet. Some are waving their hands or hit their hands and feet to warm up their

extremities. We can hardly see out of the windows because they are covered with a thick sheet of ice. It is starting to get dark. Slowly, the fog is settling on to the soil of Holland, and a snowstorm sets in. It is getting darker and darker.

A few try to scrape the ice from the window, to be able to read the names of places we pass. Yes, we are still going east and must be close to the border.

"What will happen to us? What is coming?" Those questions are hammering constantly in our heads. Now it is completely dark.

Very tired we are slumped in our seats and stare before us. Seven hours now, we have gone in the direction of Germany. Why do they torment us; why they leave us hanging with the unknown? Sometimes our route goes through towns and a faint light shines on us unlucky people, who are in total despair, like cattle being sent for slaughter. The cold is unbearable. We must try to keep our teeth from chattering.

Suddenly, we see very large lamps and a sharp curve, and the bus finally stops. Outside we hear several voices. We are so ice cold that we can hardly get up. "Everyone out, line up in twos," the command is given. Only barely, we are able to move. Soldiers, police, buses, and lights are the first things we see. Already, some other busses are standing here, like ours. We have to stay in a row in front of a long building with six windows which are covered with bars. In front of us is a big green fence with barbed wire on top. "Maybe this Dachau", somebody says behind me. Our teeth are chattering. "March." We go along the fence and a small door is opened and the men from bus number 6 enter the building. We are lead into a square, which is fenced in with barbed wire. Without being able to take all this in, we are pushed onward into another building. "What?", I open my eyes wide. "What is this?" I call out very loudly. Amazed, we stand still. Before us are halls with tables and lamps. On each table are large tin bowls, and table upon table as far as we can see. With almost hysterical laughing, the comrades arriving earlier come towards us, to look for relatives and friends. Six people are placed at each table. At each place a bowl

is positioned with the following contents: A large tin pan and a can, a comb, a bar of soap, a small piece of butter, a smaller piece of cheese, and a piece of black bread. I start to laugh. Like idiots we all start to laugh, but it is a hysterical laughter because of our total despair. Fredl and I sit down at our designated place. I am very stiff and cannot talk or get up. A friend from our lunchroom runs towards us. With stupid laughing he explains the situation to us. We are in Veenhuizen⁵⁵. There are four halls, with approximately 60 refugees in each. "Have you already seen our beautiful bedrooms?" a friend asks. Willingly, we are led to a higher part of the building.

We have already been surprised many times, but the following scene is the ultimate surprise. We step into a large hall with a domed ceiling and begin to laugh. There are cells after cells in rows, like animal cages, with a number on each. Inside each is a hammock with a blanket. The hall and the hallways between the cells, are so long that I can not see the end. After a few minutes we start to get so cold, that we had to go downstairs to our tables. In the meantime, more new men and acquaintances enter. A higher ranking officer marches through the halls. Everyone stands up. Cards were being distributed, which had a printed message to be sent to family or friends⁵⁶. No one is allowed to

⁵⁵ Veenhuizen is one of the largest and most notorious prisons in Holland. It is said that Sing Sing prison was designed after Veenhuizen. It is actually a collection of various prison camps, one of these being called "Norg."

⁵⁶ We were not allowed to write about our situation. Since there were a considerable number of married men who had left their wives and children without any message, they were eager to have contact of any kind with their family. The same was true for the younger men who wanted to inform their parents of their whereabouts. We are able to buy printed cards which said, "We are in Veenhuizen. We are doing well." This was the well known manner of "correspondence" from the German concentration camps. Families regularly received such printed cards, even if the person had been dead for months.

write outside Holland. "Hall number 2, you go to sleep." We enter the ice cold hallway and stop, not knowing where to go. Everywhere we hear doors being shut. Suddenly, I was kicked and a door is shut behind me- I am in a cage. I can straighten up, and I can turn around, but that is the extent of my space. In the hammock is a round sack filled with straw, from which one falls left or right against the cold iron walls. I call Fredl. He is on my left side, and another friend is on my right side.

Officials come with lists. "What is your name?" "Erwin Kampelmacher" I respond. "Number 21", he yells back at me. It is like changing my name. I say my name and suddenly I am only a number.

My whole body shakes from the cold and I take my shoes and cloak off. I lay down on the nearly cylindrical sack of straw, and put everything that I have on top of me. All lights are put out, and the officers are wishing us a "Good night", in a hateful tone of voice. Outside, I hear a few barred doors being closed; one encloses each section of cages, and one encloses the entire hall. In case someone should escape his cage, which is totally impossible, he next stands in front of enormous barred doors.

And then a hellish noise starts. Names and numbers are called. Many are breaking out in hysterical laughter and others are crying. Jokes are being told, and we try with some humor to get over this emotional situation. But soon it is very quiet in the hall, even though very few can sleep. Another enemy is creeping into the cells; the cold. We are cold through and through and, from the breathing of so many, a wet fog is descending upon us. Hopelessly, we toss and turn. It is now 12:00 at night.

In this horrible situation, behind bars, a prisoner, I again see pictures from the past. A few weeks ago, I was still at home, yes, at home. But what have I done wrong since then? What have I done that they put me in here like an animal in a small cage, at a temperature below zero? The same thoughts seem to be in everyone's mind. Hour after hour passes, and the calls are getting louder and louder. "What have we done?" "Why do you imprison us so terribly?" Suddenly,

a voice starts to speak, sharply and very clear. He asks for a hunger strike, in case they still want to keep us here another night. Everyone agrees. Once a guard comes through. Many yell, "Open up." But, the man goes back very slowly and without interest. I look at my watch all the time.

The cold is terrible, and I had not imagined how much it could hurt. Many jog, like crazy ones in their two-step cell, back and forth; two hours, three hours, four hours. I can not remember a night being so long, for my entire life. Still, we discuss the possibilities to avoid another night in these cages. I doze off a little bit, but wake up very shortly. My body is shaking due to the cold and the damp air is hard to breath in. Then I can't stand it any longer and I start to beat myself, just to warm up my body. This goes on for about three terrible hours which no man can tell accurately.

December 20, 1938

The next morning, the man calling for a hunger strike, speaking with much authority, asked to urgently see the prison director and told him that nobody is going to touch any food, if we had to spend another night in the cages. Following this discussion we were allowed to bring our straw sacks downstairs in the evening; on the ground floor, there are stoves burning day and night.

Even though we are able to sleep downstairs, our despair grows. Men coming back from the hospital tell us that even the sick are behind the barred doors and nobody pays attention to them. One of our friends shows signs of severe infection, and nobody seems to bother about it. Shortly, someone tells that this man jumped out of a window the night before, and broke both of his legs. At that moment, a door is opened into one of the neighboring halls and a young boy is carried out, lying on a flat table top.

We do not touch our food in the morning and at lunch time. Many are shouting and complaining, others are still, some want to go back to Germany. Again and again we ask ourselves, "Where is the democracy of free Holland?", and, "Where is the difference between

Dachau and Norg⁵⁷?" In the afternoon, they bring us mashed beans with vinegar. Even though we are very hungry, nobody touches the food. From minute to minute, one can see the despair rising.

If hunger and cold has not beaten us down, now comes another terrible experience. In the twilight, as we all sit down at the tables whispering, someone turns on the lights and guards come into the hall, carrying large bundles. Everything becomes very quiet. Without a word, they put three bundles down and go on their way. We look at each other, but nobody says a word. The bundles are green prison suits we have to put on so that we look like prisoners. One could hear only the breathing in the hall. No one is ready for this. The prison director comes in and says very abruptly, that we have to put on these suits. Many are at first against it, but everyone puts the suits on. And again, as it occurred on the first evening, comes the hysterical laughing, the laugh of despair. We look at each other. Everything is green, everyone is in prison suits, everyone is labeled as a prisoner, prisoners who were simply running to find freedom.

December 22, 1938

This morning brings a typical incident. While we all are speaking in a hushed voice, in front of a warm stove, the door opens and the second officer in command comes in with a man. Suddenly, one of our men shouts out loud, "prison". Right away more and more men join in that call until all are participating, loudly shouting "Dachau" and "concentration camp." The officer goes pale and the other man also seems to realize what is going on. The officer screams in his loudest angry tone, "Bastards! If you want I will give you a second Dachau." These words hurt us like lashes from a whip. Immediately, everything becomes quiet and the two men leave. As it later turns out, the gentleman was a government representative. The officer must have

⁵⁷ A subsection of the Veenhuizen prison, the one in which we are confined.

been called away, probably because of this incident, because we have never seen him again.

Today a canteen is opened in the prison. After 10 minutes and much fighting, everything was sold out. I was lucky to have been able to buy 5 small bars of chocolate, which I consumed immediately. In the twilight men are depressed and sitting quietly around the tables. Outside snowflakes are falling and the night is coming on. I go to the barred window and look outside. There is little but wide open land with snow as far as one can see. In the far distance, one can barely see a farmhouse with a thatched roof. It is a northern winter landscape.

I close my eyes and start to dream. This used to be the first day of our Christmas vacation. In town, the windows of the stores are filled with all kinds of goods, like always around Christmas time. Everyone is in a festive mood. Then I am skiing. Faster than ever before, I go down the hill, through the wide spaces covered with snow, and towards the prison "Norg." I awake suddenly out of my dreams. "Pick up your straw sacks and go to sleep." I take a small mirror out of my pocket, and look at it after a long time; I look very tired. I look very badly, and the prison suit is much too big. Sorrily, I smile to myself, and again look at the quiet winter scenery. I question myself, "Why?" And this "Why", this knowing, that I am innocently in prison, steals away my necessary night of rest.

December 23, 1938

It is now several days, that we are away from the outer world. Our letters are censored and we don't even know if they have been sent on their way. This morning for the first time, we are able to go for a walk. We must stand in pairs in a row, and then under supervision of the guards, we have to march for two hours out in the snow. This is what I have always pictured as Siberia in my fantasy, but it is in Holland. Green prison suits, our heads and faces covered with towels, so we drag ourselves through the

wide open land. It is a terrible picture. On our way, we encounter other prisoners, wearing identical prison suits. They are the "normal guests" of this large prison complex, and greet us happily.

On our march we can see that this whole area is very large. Tired, we return around noon. A worker is putting up curtains over the windows. Everyone is convinced that this means we will be here a long time. A few men are starting to talk to the man and, after a while, they are able, with words and money, to give him a post card and persuade him to mail it. The card is addressed to the chief Rabbi. We are asking the Rabbi to come to the prison right away.

Finally, mail came in today. Many are reading their letters over and over again. Those who did not get any mail are standing by the window, shifting from one foot to the other. The sun is going down and darkness is descending.

December 24, 1938

On the same day as Christmas eve we have our Chanuka feast⁵⁸. The chief Rabbi received our card and came to us right away; now we all stand in a hall together. The chief Rabbi sits on a bench and we are all around him. He begins to speak and his first words are very quiet. He tells us how Jews have been persecuted for centuries, how they fought for their freedom, and compares our situation with what has happened throughout history. We listen attentively. "Do not hang your head. Think back to your childhood and the feast of Chanuka, think about freedom, which certainly will come for all of us; and join me in

⁵⁸ The Chanuka feast, which takes eight days, is a commemoration of the fight of Judas Maccabeus and his sons against the Syrians in 167 B. C. At the time, an oil lamp which normally burned for a few hours, burned for eight days; this was considered to be an act of God. Therefore the commemoration of this period by Jews is to light one candle each day for eight days.

singing Maos Tsur⁵⁹." The last words the Rabbi almost shouted out.

Behind him the candles are flickering, and all of us start to sing Maos Tsur. I have never heard a song being sung like this and with such emotion in all my life. And while we are gathered around, the Rabbi starts, with tears streaming down his face, "Am Jisrael Chai⁶⁰", the old song of the Jews; tears are now running down my face and onto my green jacket. More and more men are crying. Here we are, the Jewish people, imprisoned, persecuted, but not without hope. We sing with full abandonment, "We want to live and we shall live." "Next year a happy Chanuka feast in Erez Israel⁶¹". Darkness has fallen. We lay on our sacks of straw and think about the last hours. "Maos Tsur." It gave us new hope, new power for new suffering. "Am Jisrael Chai." Then I fall asleep very quickly.

December 25, 1938

After washing my face with ice cold water, I look out of the window. On the horizon I see a single red ball of light, and it glistens on the snow in different colors. I still think about yesterday evening. Slowly, the red ball rises. First it was night and darkness, and now follows the day. After bad time comes the good. The red ball rises higher and higher, and sends its' warm rays, and its' golden showers upon the landscape on to us. Shouldn't luck follow this also? I stay by the window watching the sun come up. A new day has started.

⁵⁹ The "Maos Tsur" is a hymn of many religions; "O, strong castle of my belief."

⁶⁰ "The Jewish people will live."

⁶¹ Erez Israel means "Land of Israel"

In the mid-morning we go to the bath rooms. This bath leaves a terrible impression on me. With guards watching over us, we are led across the yard. The bath itself seems to be the same as it was in the middle ages. But, at least it is water, and warm water at that. In the evening the Rabbi comes again, and again we sing. And suddenly one of the officers comes in, stands on one of the benches, and tells us that next week we will leave this place. There are many happy tears on this evening, many hug each other, and others just look at each other in happiness. In another hall, some are dancing an Hora⁶², elsewhere jokes are being told. A true feast of happiness is taking place and this evening we lay ourselves happily onto the hard bags of straw, happy to think that we will perhaps soon be able to sleep in a bed.

December 28, 1938

We will leave on the third of January; everyday and every hour we talk about it. The atmosphere has totally changed. We also are now receiving better food, and we are living the last few days in waiting, but at the same time in fear for the future. Even though we do not know what awaits us, we believe that it cannot be worse than it is here.

December 31, 1938

Someone awakens me at 11:00 at night. I have the night watch during the next two hours. My duty is to refill the heating stoves and to see that no sparks or burning coal pieces fall on the floor, with so many straw mattresses nearby. I get up very sleepily and start my night watch. It is New Year's Eve. And as I sit by the stove, with 60 men laying on straw sacks sleeping into the New Year, I am with myself and think about the old year.

It is hard for me, to comprehend the difference between this evening and the last New Year's eve, and

⁶² The Hora is a typical Jewish round dance, probably originating from the Russians or Ukrainians

it is hard to fathom what all has occurred. The Opera with the performance of "The Fledermaus", the celebration on the Stephanplatz, the escape, confinement in prison, all during the same year, and this New Year's Eve- Veenhuizien! These experiences are such a contrast to each other that one can hardly believe that all this is true. How can man describe all this? Can I describe it in these lines? No, we who endured such a period of danger, carry the burden of these memories with us for the rest of our lives. We hate those who have done this to us. This year, my whole being is completely changed; my whole future has changed. This one year has brought me so much evil, so much despair, that I am totally numb today. And, I am not the only one; many others also who lie here have been through all the suffering and despair.

Ghostly, the shadows crawl along the walls, many sigh in their sleep, others mumble uninterruptedly. The bells are ringing outside. Quickly, I close my eyes and think of myself in the middle of the Stephanplatz. It is too late though, for somewhere outside I hear a door close, and that brings me back to reality. As the bells are ringing, I look out the window. A magnificent cloudless night displaying all the stars; it is 1939. And again I question myself as I did last year, but this time with much more reason: How will this New Year be? Where will I spend my next New Year's Eve?

Chapter 2

Within the Fortified Village

The announcement of our transfer to another refugee camp on January 3 was received with great pleasure and satisfaction. We believed to have scored a victory, although we didn't know how we achieved this victory. As was the case with our transportation to Veenhuizen, we were not given any information regarding our future domicile. This resulted in many and all kinds of rumors.

The name "Hellevoetsluis"¹ may have been mentioned by one of the prison guards, but the name was too difficult for us to pronounce, let alone remember. The principal rumor said that we were being transferred to the western part of Holland, to an island, and, on the island, an ancient fortress. As it later turned out, there was truth in most of the rumors but our destination was unknown for a long time. One could feel the excitement and tension; sleep was almost impossible and everyone counted the hours in order to leave the hated Veenhuizen as soon as possible. One thing seemed certain, that any destination away from Veenhuizen could only be better.

After a sleepless night, the busses arrived to pick us up early the morning of January 3, 1939. Since we did not have much luggage (we went to the Amsterdam police station expecting to return to our homes), the loading was easy and fast. Most of us had refused to take the pieces of bread, the thimble of butter and the small lump of cheese, which was passed out at breakfast as a provision for the bus trip. The refusal was partly a last protest against Veenhuizen, and partly due to the expectation to be welcomed with a nice meal at our new destination. The reason for this optimism, no one could explain.

We arrived at Hellevoetsluis in the evening, the trip having crossed Holland, from far north and then west to the coast of the North Sea. We were tired but full of expectations. The name of the town was mentioned so often by our guards, that we were used to the name by the time we arrived. It was already dark outside, so we could not see much of the little village, but the lighted windows in the small houses gave us a cozy impression; it was all the more cozy when one compared it with

¹ Hellevoetsluis is a village on a bay on the west coast of Holland at the North Sea.

the snow-covered wasteland slopes behind the barred windows at Veenhuizen. Our group of approximately 200 men was accommodated in the "Debarkementsgebouw²," a kind of marine barracks with a main building and several small barracks. I do not remember in detail our meal on this first evening, but compared with the sour potato lumps with small meat particles which we received daily at Veenhuizen, it was certainly a banquet.

The camp was managed by marine officers and the food prepared by Dutch marine personnel. In the various sleeping rooms were stable beds, a large table in the middle of the room and one of the walls was covered by numbered cupboards for our personal belongings. The whole place was probably standard for military barracks, but neither myself nor my refugee friends had ever been in barracks. Along the sleeping rooms on the first and second floors were balconies, from which one could look down into an open space, a kind of large entrance hall. The rooms were warm and the beds were covered with white sheets and nice woolen blankets. The welcome by the camp commander and his two officers was friendly. In one day, we converted from criminals into "marine soldiers." The room which I shared with 20 of my fellow sufferers was on the sea side of the building.

In the beginning, we called all the water around us as "sea" until our orientation improved and we realized that the "sea" was the so-called "Haringvliet³," and was actually a bay between two islands. The lights we saw in the distance from our window belonged to an island on the opposite side of the bay, called Goree-Overflakkee. The next few days, when compared to Veenhuizen, brought a number of surprises with regard to the food and some other aspects. The meals were served in the sleeping quarters at the large central table. Before dinner, on the second day, a bell rang which we had been told was a summons to report to the entrance hallway. Here the commander again welcomed us and announced a number of rules that must be observed in the barracks. Then a big surprise came. After dinner on the next day the doors of the building would be opened and we were allowed to walk freely for two hours in the village. On a bulletin board was a drawing on which one could see that we were indeed in a fortified compound surrounded by high walls. The commander informed us that between 7-9 PM, the four fortress entrances would be guarded by marine police and it was forbidden

² A building originally utilized for shipping.

³ Literally means "Herring Water"

for us to be outside the fortress. Efforts to escape were senseless, he explained, and punishment would be inflicted not only on the guilty person, but the whole group as well. I do not believe that any one of us had played with the idea of attempting to escape. We had no money, did not speak Dutch, and did not know where to go if an escape was successful. On our first evening, one of my roommates had said, perhaps as a joke but more likely a simple lack of knowledge, that the lights on the other side could be England and that one could escape by swimming. During the next few days, our knowledge of local geography increased substantially, and this kind of talk made no sense at all.

On our first "evening of freedom," we finished our dinner quickly and at around 6:30 PM nearly our whole crew was gathered in the broad corridor, leading to the outside doors. There was some pushing in order to not lose even a few seconds of the promised freedom. Many were constantly checking their watches and very excited. After our three weeks of imprisonment, the need to walk around feeling free, even in a limited area, was paramount. Moreover, we knew that in a few minutes we would see shops, coffeehouses and who knows what other kinds of surprises. At exactly 7:00 PM, the doors were opened and we rushed into the cold evening. In my mind, I compared this scene with Beethoven's opera "Fidelio" where the prisoners having been held for a long time in a dark dungeon approached the light of a sunny day. We too could sing a hymn of joy.

Our first evening in the village was an evening of exploration. Our impression was the sharp and salty air of the sea, which was swept into the village by strong winds. Although dark, our orientation was not difficult. From the bay a canal with sluice doors ran into a small harbor in the center of the village. There were small houses on both sides of the canal. Our barracks were the first buildings on the south side beyond the entrance to the harbor, at the level of the sluice doors. From our barracks one walked only five minutes to a central square with shops and a little park. In the middle of the park was a wooden bandstand for concerts. Over a bridge, which could be opened to allow ships to pass, one could reach the other side of the canal, where the original military barracks were located. At the entrance to some half-sunken buildings, was a board with the following message: "If the enemy approaches, doors should be closed." There were some other small and badly lighted paths which lead to the fortress and wall. Here the paths ended, at least for us, as there were military police guarding the gates.

The policemen greeted us in a friendly manner. Here we came to the end of our walk which only took us 10 or 15 minutes. This being the case, most of us then gathered on the well lighted central square, where we looked into shop windows. Once or twice one of the elder men in our group entered a coffee house and ordered a beer. But this was an exception, certainly during our first evenings.

Our main activity was "looking at the monkeys," which means we observed the natives, mainly boys and girls who had faced the cold and wind and who looked with the same curiosity at the strangers who had suddenly streamed in. The evening of January 4, 1939 must also have been a special experience for the inhabitants of Hellevoetsluis. There occurred then an invasion of about 200 men, young and old alike, who spoke German, strolled the streets uncertainly, looked into the lighted living rooms with open curtains, men who gathered before shop windows and did not know what to do with their unexpected freedom. This all occurred during our precious two evening hours, as nobody wanted to go "home" even one minute before 9:00 PM, despite the bitter cold.

Some of the boys and girls tried to come in contact with us youngsters; but besides laughter and funny remarks in German or Dutch, which the other party did not understand, we had no contact with local people. We discovered on this first evening out, the shop of "Fish-Willy," as we learned to call him, the central point of our interest. Fish-Willy, who played a very special role in our eight months in Hellevoetsluis, was the owner of a small shop at the central square, where one could buy not only fish, but candies and utility goods. Due to our "invasion," Willy had fixed extra illumination in his shop window, where he displayed all kinds of tempting items, expecting that so many newcomers could only mean increased sales and income. Willy was a plump fellow, who was fond of all kinds of alcoholic beverages and who, as soon as we met, succeeded to make many friends among us with his strange gibberish manner of speaking. He praised his goods continuously, especially his peanuts and chocolates. He made it very clear that one could buy on credit, if you did not have all the money it took to purchase a particular item. It, of course, rapidly became common knowledge in the village that we received 40 Dutch cents (10-15 cents U.S.) per week of spending money. It was Willy's goal to secure as much as

possible of this 80 Dutch guilders⁴ which the whole group received each week.

He had bought a ledger, a book with an alphabetical register, in which to write the names of those of us, who were totally without funds and who looked forward eagerly to the 40 cents per week. Willy not only sold nearly everything, but he was also a great source of advice and information to us. With a few others, I was one of the youngest inmates in the camp. Some of us were addicted to cigarettes, others to chocolates or peanuts, snack items that were not included in the daily rations at the marine barracks. I myself belonged to the chocolate addicted group. On the first evening, Willy had already built a tower of small chocolate bars with the name "NOOT"⁵ on the cover in his shop window. The bars contained nuts and raisins and consisted of four blocks, each one having one of the letters of NOOT. The bars cost five cents each, and I fell in love with them from the first bar on. For all the temptations in Willy's shop, 40 cents per week did not buy much, as most of us had no other source of funds. Many of us therefore were soon in debt at Willy's even though there was little chance of paying it back. This was no problem for Willy, as when the debt climbed to several guilders, Willy would accept clothes, watches, shoes or any item of value. It was easy to forget that the 40 cents per week also had to be used for toothpaste, razor blades and, above all, stamps for letters home. The reality was that many of us only had 20-25 cents per week for Willy. For me, this meant four or five chocolate bars, quite inadequate considering the fact that we strolled nearly two hours each evening through the cold and foggy streets. We found Willy's shop warm and cozy and found a piece of chocolate cheaper than a drink in a coffeehouse, which we could not afford anyway. Since one could buy on credit, my debt with Willy rapidly grew to more than four guilders. I had no idea how I might pay this debt off!

But I was young and rationalized this as: Comes time, comes good counsel! To ask my parents for money was not possible, as since my departure, they also left Vienna and were waiting in Italy for permission to go to Paris, where two brothers of my mother lived. To ask my uncles for money was also out of the question; I had seen both of them only once or perhaps twice. Moreover, I was a young man and had to prove that I could stand

⁴ Dutch currency; 80 guilders equaled \$24 U.S.

⁵ Nut

on my own two feet. However, before leaving Vienna, my parents had received a letter complaining of the cold weather in Holland. When my mother mentioned this in a letter to her oldest brother, a well known tailor in Paris, he sent me a beautiful, plush coat made of artificial fur, which arrived at Hellevoetsluis shortly after we did. The coat was very warm, certainly if compared to my old raincoat, which had survived our escape and the imprisonment at Veenhuizen, and now looked very shabby. After receiving the new coat, I strutted like a peacock through the village.

Willy liked the coat very much. He took the material between his thumb and forefinger, smiled and said only, "Magnificent!". During the following days I noticed, that he began to take longer to write down my new debt in his ledger and studied the page longer than usual, shaking his head. Two weeks later he said: "More than five guilders⁶ you owe, that's quite an amount!". I did not know what to say after that remark. I reduced my consumption of chocolate bars to one or two per week, but shortly realized that this would only slow down the increase in my debt to him. Whenever I was in his shop, Willy referred to my beautiful coat. When my debt passed six guilders, I had great misgivings, but asked Willy casually, what the value of the coat might be. I can still remember his answer: "That coat you say? It is such a small size, and would fit only a child! But, you know what? I like you very much. If you give me the coat, I will reduce your debt by four guilders. That leaves 1.80 guilders that you still owe. Isn't that a fine offer?" I gave him no answer and left quite angry. Four guilders for such a beautiful coat! I was so depressed that I returned to our room, laid down on my bed, and blamed myself bitterly for creating such a situation. Weeks passed. I reduced my expenses, even trying to buy no chocolate at all, but could not refrain for very long. The two hours on the street were long, our food was certainly sufficient, but was very monotonous. When I saw others buy sweets at Willy's, the temptation was just too big.

The weather had become somewhat milder and I started to wear my old raincoat again. From time to time Willy inquired, with a sly smile, how the little coat was doing. In the meantime, my debt was increased to seven guilders. At the end of a warm spring day I said to myself: "Summer is coming, and

⁶ Five guilders equals about \$1.50 US in 1938.

who needs a winter coat in the summer?" The same day and with the coat over my arm, I went to Willy's shop. "Here is the coat," I said, "and please reduce my debt by four guilders." Willy responded, "Are you crazy? That was in the winter. What do you do with a winter coat in the middle of summer? But, you know what? I like you very much and therefore I will reduce your debt by 2.5 guilders. This is really a good price. Nobody buys a coat for more than that!" Without saying a word, I put the coat on his table and walked with tears streaming down my face to our barracks and further to the dike nearby. There I sat down and looked at the lights on the islands in the bay for a long, long time. This experience has left a scar on my soul, namely a panic for a shortage of money, and a nearly pathological need to be free of debt, even if the debt is very small.

Meanwhile, we became quite used to the daily routine. There was no longer any crowding in the evening at the door waiting to be released at 7:00 PM, and only a few gathers at the door at 6:30 PM. We had nothing at all to do for the whole day. One could read, if the other inmates were not too noisy, but they usually were too noisy. One could play cards or domino, or just aimlessly stroll through the building. That was the day, therefore the walk every evening became the high point of the day. We young guys and the unmarried men tried to come in contact with the village girls. We could walk together with a girl on the few streets in the village, trying hard to overcome the language barrier. And, if one of us walked hand in hand with a girl, the guy believed very near the goal, which as I remember, was never reached. To be invited into one of the village homes was highly unusual, only occurring to one of our comrades, who was an excellent player of the violin. He was regularly invited to participate in home concerts with families, where various instruments were played. The rest of us aimlessly took the evening stroll for two hours, even after several months at Hellevoetsluis, hanging around shops or walking out on the dyke if the wind was not too strong. During the winter months the cold had forced us to go back early to the barracks, but with warmer weather, nobody returned ahead of time and resented having to leave the village.

One of the highlights of our daily life was the visit of the women, a happening in needs of explanation. On December 19, 1938, only male refugees were arrested. Women and children remained in Amsterdam with no problem. At the end of January, the first visit of women allowed was announced for the next

Sunday between 12-4 PM. The inmates received permission to go into the village during these hours, instead of the usual evening hours. Not only the married men, but we youngsters and the unmarried men looked forward to the occasion. Besides the chance to see the wives of many of the men we had been living with for several weeks, we also would have the chance to see the village in daylight for the first time. For the married men, who had not seen their wives and children, also permitted to come, the forthcoming visit was reason for much excitement. What was going to happen? Would the men with wives and children have to stroll through the few streets during these hours, or did they have to sit in coffeehouses, not able to spend much money for drinks?

Willy, our guide and advisor, had as a matter of course, heard immediately of this visit and had casually told a few married men, that with his help, it might be possible for a few hours during the visit of the wives to rent one or more rooms in the village. This word spread rapidly and the married men besieged Willy's shop. Due to the small supply and great demand for suitable rooms, Willy worked out a timetable. All available rooms would be rented for 30 minutes per couple, and with more need, they might be available for only 15 minutes. This is exactly what occurred the first Sunday and the following Sundays, once per month.

Immediately after arrival of the busses with women and children, four or five couples began waiting in front of the houses which were renting rooms. The men waiting outside looked at their watches every minute and knocked on the window if the time was up. The knocking was accompanied with remarks like "Come on Charles, there are more waiting outside" or "Max, does it really take so much time?" Women who had brought their children asked them to go for a walk or engaged us youngsters to take care of them for the 30 minutes. The expressions on the faces of the women were explicit, reflecting a mixture of inconvenience, concern and shame over the occasion, which could not be avoided.

The owners of the houses who rented rooms were either in church or walked with their family outside the ⁷walls. During bad weather, they gathered with their whole family in another room of the house. Willy was a busy man, indeed, on such Sundays. He walked, taking fast steps from one house to

⁷ The village was established originally as a walled fortress. Subsequently, the village expanded outside the fortress walls, so that the fortress now only comprised a small part of the village.

another, arranging everything like a conductor, never forgetting to collect the rent. The excitement of the forthcoming Sunday visit was present for days before in the barracks, especially when the married men tried to provoke jealousy in us unmarried men with suggestive remarks. This was especially prone to occur in our common wash and shower rooms, as: "Let the mast down, Sammy, sailing is only scheduled for Sunday," or "Oh boy, Joe, your poor wife, what is she going to do with a thing hidden under the blades of grass?" This went on for days, because there were no other activities at all, and any opportunity to make jokes was used to the fullest extent. The impression created and left with us young boys was easy to understand.

With the women on Sunday visits, also came a younger brother of Fritz Schwarz. I knew the brothers quite well from Vienna, and they had departed for Holland only a short time before I left. Fred, the younger brother, was only 15 and was below the age to be sent to a refugee camp. During one of his visits, Fred told us that there was a home for Jewish refugee children in Eindhoven, and that he had received a notice to report to this home. Due to this, his brother Fritz, who was three years older, applied to be transferred from Hellevoetsluis to the so-called "Dommelhuis"⁸ in Eindhoven⁹. He expressed his wish to be together with his younger brother and emphasized, due to his age, that he would prefer to be in a children's home and not in the men's community at Hellevoetsluis. Some months later his request was granted and Fritz was transferred to Eindhoven. Due to this positive decision for Fritz, I too asked to be transferred to the Dommelhuis, now being the youngest in the camp. I was not too hopeful that my request would be granted. After all, I had become 19 in the meantime and had no brother in the children's home.

After I had left Vienna, my parents did all they could to find a place of residence for my sister, who was three years younger than I. They finally succeeded to find a receptive family in England with whom she might live. In the spring of 1939, my sister travelled with a "children transport" arrangement to Great Britain. My parents informed me that her

⁸ Literally means "House on the River Dommel".

⁹ A town in south central Holland, close to the border with Belgium. The town is well known as the headquarters of the Philips Corporation.

train would pass Rotterdam on its way to Hoek of Holland¹⁰. In the meantime, they had learned that Hellevoetsluis was not too far from Rotterdam and suggested that I try to meet my sister during her short stop at the main railway station in Rotterdam. I was sure such a request had never been made to our commander, but using all of my courage, I asked the commander if I could travel to Rotterdam to meet my sister. We knew the stereotype answer to all questions out of the routine was, "We have to check in The Hague."

To my great surprise, I received an answer within just a few days. I received permission to travel to Rotterdam on the day my sister's train would pass, with the condition that I be escorted by two military policemen. Moreover, I would have to pay for the trip for all three, not just myself. Although this did not involve a great amount of money, the commander and I both realized that this could be the stumbling block of the whole undertaking. I proposed to the surprised commander, that my weekly 40 cents should be withheld until my debt for the tickets was paid. The commander finally agreed, probably impressed by my perseverance and the fact that I would forgo the nearly holy 40 cents per week of pocket money.

On the scheduled day we traveled with the small local train to Rotterdam. We, myself in my shabby raincoat and the two policemen in dress uniforms, having snowy white shoulder pads and high kepi's¹¹. The international train arrived on time; I saw my sister shortly, behind a window in a train door, with a white identity card hanging around her neck. She stood right there in order to get out rapidly, as the train stopped for only a few minutes in Rotterdam. After embracing each other, she told me about our parents and the situation in Vienna, which could not be said in a letter. All the time she looked at the large policemen staying close behind me. When I told her, not realizing my stupidity, that these were my guards, she could not utter another word. She handed me a small parcel from my parents, said a hasty "Goodbye" and got back onto the train. I can still see her through the dirty train window, surrounded by laughing and waving children, all with their identity cards

¹⁰ A village on the western coast of Holland, directly west from Rotterdam. It is and always has been a major departure point for ferries going to Great Britain, and also for trains carried by ferries.

¹¹ A military type cap.

around their necks. I could tell through the windows that she was frozen with fear, and had tears in her eyes, having seen a picture she could not comprehend; her big brother under police guard as though a criminal. She had no way of knowing that my presence to meet her was, after all, a kind of victory.

Back in the barracks, I had to tell about my experiences over and over again. After all, I was the first one and probably the last one who has been able to visit the big town of Rotterdam. I had to deal with the contents of the small parcel that my sister had given to me. To share packages with the roommates was our unwritten law. But much more important was the money and a letter my parents had sent to me. There was enough to pay all my debts, not only with the commander but, more importantly, also with Willy. After paying all, there was plenty left over for many chocolate bars into the future.

At the middle of May, we were instructed to gather into the main hall for announcements; it had been a long time since we had done that. To our big surprise, we were informed that starting the next week, the doors of the barracks would be open from 10:00 AM until 10:00 PM. We could walk all day in the village, while the portals in the wall were carefully guarded by military police during that 12 hours. The new found freedom was widely used during the first few days, but after a short time everyone took the open doors for granted and only a few chose to walk the streets. I had found a lovely place at the harbor entrance, where I used to sit peacefully in the sun, reading a book or simply looking over the expanse of water, dreaming about a future that was very much in question. The rural tranquility, the murmur of the sea, the sleepy village behind me, all being contrary to the outside world, where the signs of coming catastrophe were evident to those who chose to see these signs. The majority of the camp refugees seemed fairly disinterested in the events outside our barracks. They lived from one day into the next without any activity, without any goal for the future.

Early in May, I was asked to report to the commander's office. There was a visitor for me. To my great surprise the visitor was Uri Koch, whom I knew from the Zionist youth movement in Vienna. I did not know him well, as he was at least 10 years my senior and had held a much higher position in the hierarchy of the organization. I mainly remembered that he was a man who spoke few words, as became evident during our short conversation. He informed me that a boat would soon depart from Rotterdam headed for Palestine with the intention of dropping passengers at the coast of the British mandate territory. This

was called the "Alija Beth", or the "Second Immigration", contrary to the "First Immigration", the legal entrance into the country with so-called certificates which the British mandate government administered only in dribblets. Uri, who had lived in Palestine already for several years asked me to examine how many of the Hellevoetsluis refugees might be willing to leave for Palestine with the ship. "Go to work", he said, "in a few weeks I will be back." How he had found me and why he chose me to conduct this task remained an open question for me. The commander was present during our short conversation without saying a single word. Only when Uri left I realized that he took it for granted that I would be one of the passengers. With my friend Fredl Kamiel, with whom I had escaped to Holland, I went to work. Within a few days we had collected the names of 70 or 80 of our comrades, mainly the young and unmarried men, who showed interest in the undertaking. Finally, the group included approximately 70 men.

In the middle of June, the group which had been designated the "Palestine group", was separated from the other camp inmates and was housed in a former school building. We received backpacks and a number of utensils, such as water bottles and first aid kits. A few weeks later Uri informed me, during a second visit, that we would leave shortly with a ship named "Dora." In coming weeks busses would arrive without advance notice in order to transport us to the Rotterdam harbor to meet this ship. We should not talk about the undertaking, certainly not with any of the village population. That Fredl and I had worked hard to collect and instruct our group was noticed by Uri without comment. Now we started to wait for the busses under a lot of tension. Day by day I sat at my favorite place at the entrance to the harbor, from where one could see part of the highway leading to our village, watching for the busses.

Early in July I was asked to report to the commander's office. He informed me that he had received a letter from "The Hague", in which he was told that he was not allowed to give me permission to emigrate, due to my young age. This permission could only be granted if I had a written statement from my father. My parents had in the meantime left Vienna for Italy, where they waited for permission to enter France. I had no idea of their present residence. The only possibility to reach them was to contact my uncle in Paris. One had to obtain permission several days in advance to place a telephone call, maybe even more, and certainly if it was an international call. The commander with whom I had intensive contacts during recent weeks

on behalf of our group, gave me a green light to telephone Paris the same evening.

Fortunately, I was able to reach my uncle, who explained that my parents had just arrived in Paris, and were to call back at their earliest convenience. The next day my father called me. After informing him in a few words about my plans, he without hesitation said, "I do not know what is going to happen to us, but I have very little confidence about our future. Because of all our uncertainties, it is not right that I take responsibility for your life; you must make your own decision, based upon the information you have. If you request me, I shall send my permission immediately."

I requested him to do so, as we could leave any day. My father sent this permission by telegram, due to my feeling of urgency. The next day there was another call for me in the commander's office. This time, my mother wanted to speak to me. She advised me that they had in Paris learned of the "Dora" and its' mission. They learned also that the "Dora" would be on an illegal mission, and that the ship was in very bad condition. With a lot of tears and sobbing, my mother pleaded with me to cancel the trip, which had to be highly dangerous, and to stay safely in Holland. Her brother, my uncle, would help me financially. My father then came to the telephone, repeating what my mother had said, but in cool terms and without emotion. I was stunned as we ceased our telephone conversation. I had left Vienna months before as a young boy of 18 years, and now spoke with my parents for the first time since. I was left in an extremely emotional state; and, how could I have realized, that it was to be our last conversation. I sat at my favorite place on the shore looking at the highway and watching for the busses. Day after day went by, and no busses. An express letter arrived from my parents in which they again tried to convince me to cancel this dangerous adventure, as they called the undertaking. On Friday, July 14, in the late afternoon, I informed the commander about my decision to withdraw from the Palestine group. The next morning two busses arrived.

I stood before the school building and saw my comrades lined up for the bus, including my best friend Fredl, with whom I worked during the recent weeks with such great devotion that this undertaking might actually take place. They entered the busses with their knapsacks, and the busses roared away. Sobbing, defeated, totally depressed, I sat for hours on a low wall in front of the school where the busses had left. I could not and did not want to eat. I only stared at the spot where

the busses stood just a few hours before. I could see the faces of my comrades waving behind the windows, through a veil of tears; comrades I had seen for the last time. I have neither heard of nor seen again my best friend Fredl.

Later, much later, I fully realized that on that late afternoon of Friday, July 14, 1939, an important turning point in my life had been reached. It was perhaps the most important turning point of my life. My life at Hellevoetsluis changed radically after departure of the Palestine group. The majority of youngsters with whom I had shared our lives so closely, was gone. Virtually no friends were left at the barracks. I had organized the whole undertaking; as young as I was, I had been accepted as the leader. I could approach the commander 24 hours a day. Many had shown confidence in my leadership. I felt I had betrayed their confidence by not leaving with them as their leader; and, to this day, I feel ashamed that I betrayed "my boys." The commander had closely followed my fight to make the decision to not leave, and he realized what a mental state I was in. Due to this, he on his own initiative supported my request to be transferred to the children's home in Eindhoven. His request for a rapid decision was delivered during the middle of August.

Only a few weeks later, the second world war was a fact. We had already observed much activity in the readiness of the fortress walls. More and more Dutch marines came to the increasingly fortified village; in the barracks one could feel a certain tension with the marine officers and personnel. At the end of August we were advised frequently that we would have to leave Hellevoetsluis within a few days. We would be moved to Hoek of Holland where an export slaughterhouse, no longer used for its designed purpose, had been transformed into quarters for refugees. Thus, after 8 months at Hellevoetsluis, a place where we actually felt a bit at home, our stay came to an end, quickly and unexpectedly. At our departure nearly the whole population stood along the street to the railway station, waving and calling good-bye. There were a lot of tears on both sides. "Fish Willy" went with us to the station and he was the last figure we saw on the platform waving with a red handkerchief as the train slowly pulled away from the station.

Meanwhile, a war had started, and the Palestine group probably had safely arrived at their destination. And, we refugees were taken further into a future full of uncertainty and fear

Chapter 3

The Slaughterhouse

The situation at Hoek of Holland, where the 'Slaughterhouse' was located, was totally different in comparison to the "Fortified Village." Inside the building, which was formerly an export slaughterhouse located on the north side of the Nieuwe Waterweg¹, was a broad central corridor with large halls on both sides, which had been hurriedly transformed into living and sleeping quarters. On the walls there remained the large meat hooks, which we used for hanging our clothes and possessions. The beds stood in large rows in the hallways, always poorly lighted due to the small windows situated high in the walls. Food was served in a large central hall, where one could still smell a mixture of old blood and feces. The most disturbing difference with Hellevoetsluis was that there were no open doors. The whole compound was surrounded by a high fence, and there was a large square or courtyard where one could walk a short distance. We were again in a prison. It was not as bad as Veenhuizen, but we missed the freedom of Hellevoetsluis, even though that freedom was limited. We again had to look for activities during the long days, all the time realizing that there was a war underway in Europe. The first sign to us of the war was the arrival of a number of young men, who were kept totally separated from us, and confined in a barrack in the rear of the slaughterhouse. We soon learned that these men were German deserters, whose numbers kept growing.

We were divided from these deserters by a high fence, but contact was possible. However, most of us were afraid to speak to them due to the rumors, that some provocateurs were mixed with the deserters, who might become active

¹

A canal running from Rotterdam harbor to the open sea.

following a German occupation of Holland. It remains unsubstantiated if this were true, but among we refugees, there was a tremendous fear of the "Germans", easily explained by our recent experiences in their country. Many years after the war, I heard that German parachutists landed at Hoek of Holland in May, 1940 and immediately picked up the deserters. Most of them were likely hanged on the meat hooks in the following hours. However, Professor de Jong, the most famous Dutch historian studying the Second World War, could not confirm that this actually happened. But it is certain that these men did not enjoy a happy end.

Walking or hanging around the large yard, we could regularly see all kinds of ships coming in from or going out into the North Sea. Sometimes these were big passenger ships of the Holland-America Line on their way to New York. Here we stood, imprisoned refugees, from a distance of less than 50 yards, exchanging waves with the passengers on the various decks. They, the lucky ones, were on their way to freedom and sure to leave the European theater of war.

In Hellevoetsluis we became accustomed to walking through the village, and we had discovered hobbies such as fishing and collecting shells from the beach. Or, one could sit peacefully with a book at the sea shore or in the small park; and, we slowly made more contacts with the village population, especially the girls. All this was suddenly gone, an abrupt change occurring overnight. Instead, we had to learn to enjoy ourselves in the cold, dark sleeping quarters or walk up and down in the central hallway. Fortunately, a canteen was opened, which sold cigarettes, chocolate, and some other items, where we could spend our pocket money, still 40 cents per week.

At the beginning of October, when the cold really penetrated into the large halls, the camp management decided to set up approximately 20 iron heating stoves, which used coal as fuel. I became aware that volunteers would be welcome to look after the stoves, to care for the coal supply, and to see that there was a good fire both day and night. Eager for something to do, I presented myself at the Director's office and received my first "leadership position", namely my appointment as "Chief Fireman". There was a Deputy Chief and a number of helpers, who had to bring in the sacks of coal. It was quite a structured organization for which I had the full responsibility. My task was permanent, inspecting the stoves, even at night, to

assure there was a pleasant temperature in the halls. The payment I received was four eggs per week, which I received from the canteen. Since I had no need to eat the four eggs per week, I asked the canteen boss for a payment of three cents per egg. He agreed to this, so that instead of 40 cents pocket money per week, I now had 52 cents per week, an increase of 30 per cent!

I enjoyed my "leading position" very much, but only for about three weeks. At the beginning of November, 1939 I was asked to come to the Director's office. There, to my great surprise, I was informed that my request for transfer to a children's home had been granted. I was to be taken to the Dommelhuis in the village of Eindhoven within a few days. I was happy to be leaving the gloomy slaughterhouse, but at the same time, I was sad to be leaving my friends and comrades I had been with for such a long time. Above all, I was sad to be leaving my stove crew. I had lived for nearly one year in a community of men, but now my future was a children's home, which to me was an unknown world. This gave me a feeling of uncertainty, but at the same time a lot of pleasant expectations. From one day to the next, I would be transferred from being the youngest inmate at Hoek of Holland to the oldest one in the Dommelhuis.

Chapter 4

The Children's Home

The message of my transfer to the Dommelhuis, the Children's Home, came as a big surprise. After writing my request, many weeks before, I had not thought about it as I did not believe I would receive a positive answer. And now, here I was.

The building was built many years earlier by Philips as a home for unmarried employees. Later on there was less and less need for such a home, and in 1939 the building was placed at the disposal of the Children's Committee for Jewish Refugees, Eindhoven section. A number of the town's notables were members of the Board of this Committee, but the major power for the effort was Hilda Verwey-Jonker, wife of Dr. Evert Verwey, a staff member and later Director of the Philips Physics Laboratories. These laboratories are still today known around the world for research and discoveries. Socially engaged, as she later described herself during her political career, Hilda had taken to her heart the fate of Jewish refugee children, a mission which intensified after the November, 1938 program (the Kristallnacht) in Hitler's Germany. Assisted by Philips staff members she succeeded in providing a real home in the Dommelhuis for approximately 120 refugee children. At the home there were only boys of different ages; a group of little ones around 10 years old, a large group of boys 13-16 years old, and a small group of "old men" of which I, upon arrival, became the oldest. We didn't object to being called "old men" as it was meant in fun.

Fifty years later I heard from Hilda, who celebrated her 90th birthday in May, 1998. In a book she published some years ago, she describes a board meeting of the committee. "Should we accept such old men?", the chairman asked. "Is this wise?" But at this time it had already been proven, that some boys with experience in the world of the refugee had a positive influence on the whole group.

As the step from Veenhuizen to Hellevoetsluis was a great one, the step from Hoek of Holland to Dommelhuis was even bigger. The move from the community of men at "The Slaughterhouse" to the children's home in a fashionable neighborhood of Eindhoven was indeed a big step. After leaving my parent's home in Vienna, I had undergone many experiences, that taught me great lessons about adapting to new and adverse conditions; needless to say, I quickly found my place in the Dommelhuis. It was pleasant to rejoin the brothers' Schwarz because I knew them quite well, and especially Fritz with whom I had "survived" Veenhuizen, and who showed me around in the Dommelhuis and in the town, where everything was quite new to me.

The daily management of the home was in the hands of a former gymnastic teacher, who was at the same time a pathfinder; the boys called him scoutmaster. He cared for our daily events, but Hilda was the "mother hen" who visited the home daily in order to make sure that her boys were in no need of anything whatsoever. We were free to stay and to go where we wanted, but nevertheless there was discipline and order and each boy had his special tasks in the home. Most of the boys were in school, while others undertook a period of vocational training, like carpentry or farming. Due to my interest in Zionism and my wish to emigrate to Palestine in the future, an education in agriculture and animal husbandry was my first choice. There were a number of boys with the same interest. Again, with the help and mediation of Hilda Verwey-Jonker, we received the chance to work on a large farm of Jonkheer Smits van Oyen. His farm was on the outskirts of Eindhoven near the stately mansion of the Jonkheer¹. His farm manager, whom everyone called by

1

Jonkheer is a title referring to a person of nobility.

his first name Wout² was asked, together with his numerous duties, to supervise the work of the boys from the Dommelhuis. There were seven or eight boys as I remember, who marched early in the morning in single file to the farm and in the evening, we marched back to the Dommelhuis. As the oldest boy, I was the contact person for the farm manager, and hence was responsible for good performance of our group. On our daily march to and from the farm, I walked at the head of the small group and had to look out for the sometimes very heavy traffic, to assure that all the boys reached our destination without problems.

At the farm, we cleaned the stables, fed the animals, harvested beets in the fields, sawed and worked on trees and preformed all sorts of tasks as requested by Wout. During lunch hour we received sandwiches and a glass of milk; once per week we were given some pocket money. Once in a while the Jonkheer visited the farm, talked with me and some of the boys and asked Wout how we were doing. Wout always spoke in highly positive terms about our work. He had learned after some weeks that our enthusiastic group was a real help for his heavy workload which lay on his shoulders in running the large farm.

Soon we were a well-known spectacle on the streets of Eindhoven, even more so due to our singing of German marsh-songs³, the only songs we all knew. After arriving at the home in the evening, we all took a thorough shower, changed our clothes, and participated in the daily life of the Dommelhuis. In the evening we played all kinds of games, but there were also lectures or music performances, sometimes with participation of one or more of the boys. In the meantime, we had formed an association called "Our Dommelhuis" which organized many activities; I served as the first (and only) president. The supposition of the Jewish Committee that the older boys would have a positive influence was, as far as I could tell, quite true. It would have been a nice and quiet life experience if one were not

² "Wout" is Dutch for Walter.

³ "Marshsongs" are songs learned as youngsters during school excursions or other group occasions.

constantly confronted by the threat of a war, and with it the threatened occupation of Holland by German troops. Moreover, a number of our boys still had parents and family members in Germany, while others explored all possibilities to emigrate further, in particular to the United States.

In the months to come, boys departed the Dommelhuis, emigrating overseas, seeking a home with a Dutch family, or for an education center for "Palestine Pioneers" in the north of Holland. Early in 1940 we began hearing rumors that our stay at the Dommelhuis was coming to an end, rumors which were officially confirmed some weeks later. The main reason for the dissolution of the Dommelhuis was disagreement between the central Jewish Children's Committee and the Board of the home. The details of these problems were unknown to us, and did not have our full interest anyway. Nearly half of the boys had departed for other destinations; the remaining boys at the Dommelhuis could think only about the future, "What to do? Where to go?". We had a lot to worry about, and we were consumed by uncertainty due to the circumstances of the time. However, for the time being most of us had become engaged in preparation for a farewell party, which we wanted to present for our hosts and for all who had been so helpful during our stay at the Dommelhuis. We decided this party should occur in the municipal theater, should consist of a serious and a merry part, and only our boys should participate in the performance. Everybody was busy with preparations, which served as welcome diversion from our mounting problems. The evening attracted a full house, and, with the presence of a great number of invited guests; the local newspaper of February 23, 1940 opened with the headline: "Goodbye and Good luck, Boys of the Dommelhuis. (I saw this paper only 50 years later, when Hilda Verwey-Jonker kindly sent me a copy.) The quotation from my opening speech was from Goethe's "Faust, as follows: "Hier bin ich Mensch, hier darf ich's sein"⁴. This quotation seemed to have impressed the local newspaper reporter.

The question "What next?" was of crucial importance to me. Due to the pleasant experiences at the farm and my

⁴ "Here I am a human being; here I am allowed to be a human being".

Zionist faith, which became stronger due to the political situation, I chose education as a Palestine Pioneer as my first choice. The training to become a farmer or a craftsman was important to the Zionist movement. The education in these trades was called the "turn over of the pyramid. The broad base of the pyramid (meaning the total Jewish population) were mainly intellectuals and tradesmen, because many other professions had been forbidden for Jews during former centuries. Only at the top of the pyramid were farmers or artisans. Therefore, in a future Jewish state, about which many Jews dreamed, there would be a great need for farmers and artisans. One of the consequences of this ideology provided the foundation for "kibbutzim"⁵ in former Palestine at the end of the last century.

In Holland before World War II there were two possibilities for the training of Jewish boys and girls as farmers and artisans. One possibility was the Wieringen⁶ community where boys and girls lived in groups; they were mainly trained for farm work, but also as gardeners, carpenters, metalworkers, etc. The second possibility was through the "Association for the Education of Palestine Pioneers" located at Deventer⁷; the Association was therefore known as the "Deventer Association. The main power behind the formation of this Association was a man named Ru Cohen, in whose home at Deventer a few rooms were devoted as office space. The choice of training for me was narrowed to these two possibilities: Wieringen or Deventer. The Deventer Association placed "chaluzim"⁸ at farms, where one learned the daily hand work as a farm worker. This

⁵ Farming communities.

⁶ Wieringen is a small village in the north of Holland.

⁷ A town located in eastern Holland.

⁸ Pioneers

education, called "Einzel-Hachshara"⁹ was known to be much more difficult and harder work, than the training obtained within the community at Wieringen. Only the strongest, both physically and mentally, and convinced of their Zionist ideals, chose for Einzel-Hachshara.

From the very beginning, I had no attraction to Wieringen. To again live in a sizeable community had no appeal to me. Moreover, I had the intuitive feeling that the threat of war was increasing; this meant the probable occupation of Holland by the Germans, and living on a farm in the country might be a preferable place to be. Only after the end of World War II, was I to realize from new information received that my intuition had saved my life. A great number of the boys of Wieringen were captured by the Germans and brought to the notorious concentration camp named Mauthausen, located in Austria. There they were forced to live at a quarry where they carried heavy stones every day on steps up to a hill. Due to the terribly hard labor and a minimum of food, many of the boys, in the prime of their lives, chose suicide by jumping down from a great height into the depths of the quarry. The Austrian SS guards amused themselves by calling these boys, "parachutists."

I contacted the Deventer Association and was invited to present myself, at the beginning of February, 1940, into the office of Ru Cohen. Ru was quite a character, as I had meanwhile learned, as were most of the members of this well known family. One of his brothers, David Cohen, played a major role as one of two leaders of the Jewish Council during the German occupation of Holland. He was forced to make numerous decisions during this period which are discussed even today. Another brother was Josef Cohen, a well-known writer¹⁰.

⁹ "Single training", meaning one by one, as alone on a farm rather than in a community.

¹⁰ Who could fortell that a son of Josef, Hans Cohen, would many years later become the Director General of the National Institute of Public Health for Holland, and that I would become his Deputy Director?

Upon arrival at his office, Ru Cohen had me wait in his unheated office for nearly half an hour; he came in, gave me a handshake, and said simply, "No. When I looked quite puzzled at his face, he repeated his "No, and then continued: "No, you are not the right type for Einzel-Hachshara. Go to Wieringen, where you belong. I did not at all like what I was hearing. During my whole life I had developed a repulsive reaction to such an approach. When someone said, "You are not able or qualified to do this or that, it was an extraordinary challenge to me to try and to not give in. But Ru did not know this so far. Even though he had not offered me a seat in his office, I sat down on the closest chair and said, looking straight into his eyes: "You don't know if I am able to do what is expected of me. At least give me a chance to try." He looked at me with compassion, and answered firmly: "You don't know how hard it is. You have no idea about it. Believe me. You are a boy for Wieringen. The more he said "Wieringen, the more I became convinced that it had to be "Deventer, and no place else. I continued to argue with him, but he did not give in. He tried to break my spirit even by sneering at my small stature.

Later, much later, I came to realize that his theatrical performance was the way in which potential Palestine Pioneers underwent their first test, in front of Ru Cohen's desk. This was his way to learn if one really chose for the hard way of the Einzel-Hachshara (and how hard it was, I was soon to know!). After nearly an hour of fighting with words and arguments, he suddenly and without saying a word, went to his living quarters, returning with a cup of coffee for both of us. "I would not advise it" were his final words of retreat.

As far as he was concerned with finishing my coffee, our meeting was over. "You will hear from me. Shalom. He gave me a firm handshake and in a few minutes I was walking to the railway station, fighting against a hard, cold wind that brought tears to my eyes. Only a few days later, I received a letter from Deventer asking me to present myself the following Monday at the office of the Association. There I would receive my outfitting, and a

volunteer co-worker of the Association, Leo Reichenberger, would take me to a farmer named Zweers, at Worth Rheden¹¹.

Before I realized it, my last weekend at the Dommelhuis was over. The farewell was not easy. I had spent a number of pleasant months in the home. I had made friends. I had met helpful people and had received appraisals for my activities on behalf of our small, but strong community. Now, I again was entering an uncertain future, a challenge which was not presented to me in a pleasant and positive manner. But most disturbing was the fact that in a very short time I would be on my own, without the warmth of the Dommelhuis, and without friends. My few possessions were soon collected and packed. On a cold February Monday morning, I was for the second time in one week on my way to Deventer.

¹¹ A hamlet up in the hills not far from Arnhem in the eastern part of Holland, near the German border.

Chapter 5

A Farm Hand

In Ru Cohen's office stood a man with a cup of coffee in his hand. It was a small man, although still a head taller than myself, with a friendly smile on his face. Ru's introduction was, as I had been accustomed to, as short as possible: "Dan Kampelmacher-Leo Reichenberger. Chawer¹ Reichenberger will bring you to Worth Rheden, and with a disapproving gesture toward a suitcase he said: "These are your things. Control everything. You have to sign a receipt." It was an old-fashioned suitcase made from pressed cardboard with two rust-eaten locks. In the suitcase were a pair of wooden shoes, two Manchester trousers, two gray peasant blouses, some thick grayish underwear, woolen socks, a number of red handkerchiefs with a gray motive of flowers, and a typical farmer's cap. "This is the smallest size we have, said Ru as a kind of excuse and added after some pause, "smaller, we don't have it. The cap fell over my ears, the sleeves of the blouses had to be turned up, as with the trousers, but the worst were the wooden shoes, which turned out later to be at least two sizes too big. That the blouses and trousers had to be turned up was immediately obvious after Leo's suggestion, looking with pity at my jacket and worn out raincoat, that it would be wise to put on the Manchester trousers and a blouse over my clothes. I had signed a receipt, Leo was thanked with a few words for his assistance and I received a handshake: "All the best. His face expressed his feelings, a mixture of disbelief, pity and amusement.

When we went out into the cold winter morning and Leo walked in the direction of a small motor-bicycle, I understood why he had suggested that I put on more clothes.

¹ Chawer means friend in Hebrew.

I was to sit behind him with the suitcase clenched between us. After a very few minutes, I was sorry not to have put on all the clothes from the suitcase. Leo wore a leather coat and high leather boots and I tried to shield against the raw wind behind his back. In spite of all my clothes I was cold and shivering after only 10 minutes. The worst was that I did not have gloves and had to hold the suitcase with my blue hands. From time to time I leaned against Leo's back pinching the suitcase between us in order to move one or the other stiff hand.

Meanwhile, I looked at each sign, with information about places and distances, anxiously expecting to see "Worth Rheden. Only later did I realize that I would not see this name as "Worth Rheden" as it was merely a hamlet of the village "Rheden. But, I had not seen this name either. After half an hour I saw for the first time the name "Rheden" on a street sign, it being a small town about 10 kilometers from Arnhem. Thank God, it could not be very far now. Near Rheden, Leo took a small road leading into some woods. The road soon became a sand path covered with dirty snow, ice and mud. Attempting to go up a hill, the motor-bicycle could not make it. The woods had become more dense and I began to wonder where a farm could be around here. "Get off, Leo said, "we will have to walk the rest of the way." Leo pushed the motor-bicycle through snow and mud and I followed stumbling with my suitcase, but glad to move my nearly frozen limbs. After about 10 minutes, we left the woods and saw on the top of a hill a farmhouse and barns, surrounded by a small pasture. A man stood in the middle of the path leading to the house, watching our laborious arrival. This had to be Zweers, my future boss. He was a man of normal height, as lean as a rake, with a knotty face marked by exposure to wind, weather and hard work. On his head wobbled an old, greasy hat.

"But, Mister Reichenbag², what are ya doin' to me? Ya promised a farm hand and na ya bring 'at little fellow. Oh boy, what am I suppos to do with 'im? Ya know what, Mister Reichenbag, ya take'm back." These were the words of

² I rapidly discover that Mr. Zweers spoke a gibberish form of the Dutch language, and was somewhat hard to understand.

welcome for me. I can see the scene before me after 50 years, as if it happened yesterday, and I still remember each word of the conversation. "Try it," said Leo, "he is of good will and if it does not work out, nothing is lost. You always know how to find me." "Fine, Mister Reichenbag, fine, might soon contact ya, I believe" said Zweers, still very disappointed that the Deventer Association has not sent him a giant. " 'ope he is worth the daily bread, 'ope so. Oh mister, what ya done to me?" I stood there all the time as an object, like a steer or a foal, about which two men were negotiating. I had the impression that Zweers was not really angry and that both men performed a theatrical performance, perhaps quite normal for such a welcoming ceremony. "Com' in," said Zweers finally, while brown juice of chewing tobacco ran down the corners of his mouth. I enjoyed the pleasant warmth in the small kitchen. Leo greeted the farmer's wife, a robust woman of about 40 years with the name Aleida, and an old woman who turned out to be Zweers' mother. "Na, Aleida, this is Doan, our na farmhand," Zweers said with an undertone of, "Look how they have cheated me," We all received a lukewarm cup of coffee and Leo was offered a glass of brandy, which he refused in order to stay sober, or so he said. The brandy was not offered to the farm hand, who needed it more than anyone else, being frozen to the bones. Leo looked at me a bit shy as if he wanted to say, "Sorry, don't blame me, I can't help it." After a long period of silence he said, "Now, I believe I am going to leave so I can be home before dark." He took my hand saying, "Dan, all the best."

Through a small window I saw him becoming smaller and smaller on his motor-bicycle, driving down a hill. I had the feeling that, with this picture, the last bit of civilized life had also left. Before I could get used to the surroundings, Zweers said: "Na Dan, ya na ere to gulp coffee, ya ere to woak, ya, ya, to woak." I had meanwhile noticed that he loved to repeat his short sentences, partly for self-satisfaction, and partly to have the time to think about what he wanted to say next. "The wife will scho ya where ya sloap." I had great difficulties with his gibberish language, but due to his habit of repetitions I quickly succeeded in understanding what he wanted to say. We went up a steep flight of stairs and reached an open landing. Against a small window stood a large bed with a white crocheted bed spread. Beside the bed was a small worn

out carpet. Just behind me was an open door, which gave me a view into the small bedroom of the Zweers couple. Aleida seemed to be a bit more friendly than her husband, or perhaps just less blunt than he. She realized my disappointment about the poor appearance of my new accommodations. "Look," she said, "you can draw the curtains, and then it looks like a room." From a dark corner of the landing she fetched an old rusty water jug and an even shabbier wash basin, pushing an old box near the bed and putting the wash utensils on top of it. "I shall see if I can find some soap for you," she said, "the water you have to fetch from the kitchen." Meanwhile, Zweers has climbed up the stairs in his stocking feet, just at the moment I said to Aleida, "a small curtain before the window would be fine to screen the light in the morning." "No, no" roared Zweers, whom I had not heard approaching, "no, dan't believe it, ya won't see much light, ya're ere to woak, ya hear me, to woak!" And then with irritation directed towards his wife, "come on, soon milkin time." Towards me he barked: "Put on ya clothes." When this took more than five minutes he roared from the foot of the steps, "Ya comin? or are ya asleep? ya sleeping?" I stumbled down the stairs in my wooden shoes, which were much to big. With my turned up blouse and my turned up trousers I was such a sight that Aleida rocked with laughter. "It's terrible", she said, "I will shorten your clothes in the evening." "Ya" said Zweers, "ya, wife, but first we go to woak." "Ya can churn?" he asked me. "No", I answered, "but I have seen it done, I have watched my grandmother who did it regularly." "He has seen it done!" Zweers roared loudly; "come on, Aleida, show'm how to churn the milk."

Near the kitchen was a small unheated room, where I saw sitting on the floor a narrow, round, wooden container with a cover on top that had a hole, in which a handle fitted; inside this vat there was a flat wooden disk fastened on the end of the handle. Aleida explained how, by moving the handle and disk rapidly up and down, the butter and skim milk would separate and could be collected. I started to stamp up and down, producing a dashing sound from within the vat. After five or six minutes, I looked into the vat expecting to see butter, but so far there was only milk. After a quarter of an hour of rapid stamping I became quite warm and perspiration stood in beads on my brow. I took a short rest and looked around. At this moment, Zweers emerged

from behind me, a tactic he frequently employed³. "So, ya born tired? Doan ya are ere to woak and not far lookin around, ya are far woak, ya understand? Do ya?" I started to push the handle up and down with all my power without giving an answer; Zweers did not expect an answer anyway. "Och, och" he continued, "this na churning, will na ave butter in a month." He took the handle and started to churn with strong movements. "Na ticklin, pushin, ya understand?, na ticklin." I started to stamp even faster, with a moist back, and after some more time I peered again into the vat and this time saw small particles of butter floating in the skim milk. Shortly thereafter, Aleida arrived and poured the contents of the whole vat through a cloth, which separated the butter from the skim milk. "I will fetch you the second portion of milk, so you can continue, while we start milking the cows", and she continued, "after dinner you can then go on with the remaining two other parts."

I churned the whole afternoon with an interval for a cup of tea and a slice of rye bread with fresh butter, my first food since breakfast. I was just blowing at my second cup of tea, happy to sit down for a moment, when Zweers said: "Com'on there are cows to milk." I had already heard the tinkling of chains in the kitchen, and now I entered the warm stable, where about 20 cows chewing hay looked suspiciously in my direction. "Ya don't kna how to churn, ya certainly can't milk, ya can milk?" Then Zweers continued: "But ya'll learn, ya will learn fa sure." He sat down on a small milking stool with three legs, clenched a pail between his knees, and started to milk with rhythmic motions. The jets of milk hit the bottom of the pail so powerfully, that they sounded like pistol shots. After a while he turned around and said: "Nou ya." It took me back to the farm at Eindhoven, where I frequently had watched Wout milking; I had even tried it a few times at Wout's farm. I thought it wise not to mention these experiences to Zweers but to act as if I had never before held a cow's teat in my hands.

³ On Dutch farms it was and still is custom to leave the wooden shoes outside a door and walk into the house on thick, black woolen socks. Due to this, I had to get used to not being able to hear anyone approaching, as Zweers frequently did, obviously to see how fast I was working.

There were no powerful jets, but at least I produced some milk, although the cow seemed to resent my efforts. "Na tickl, na tickli", he said, "ya ave to squeeze with power, ya with power, Doan." After some time and with great exertion I was proud to have my first pail half filled with milk. Satisfied, I showed my pail to Zweers and Aleida. Without looking into the pail, Zweers said: "Na, still much milk in cow's udder, much more, cam with me." He sat down again under "my" cow and indeed was able in no time to fill the pail with milk up to the brim. "Milk the udder full out, ya full out, otherwise ya're no help, Doan. It's bad for the cow, bad for the farmer, ya bad for the farmer. Hop, pour the milk in the can and take the next cow." While Zweers and Aleida milked seven to eight cows each, I had been able with great effort to milk two cows. And still, there remained quite a bit of milk in the udders, which Zweers finished later on. "Oh, oh, Mister Reichenbag, ya've saddled me up nicely," said Zweers loud enough for me and Aleida to hear, as a kind of final evaluation of my first session at milking. "Set the milk cans outside to cool off, clean the sieve, shake up the hay, shovel the manure behind the cows, and don't stand around idle." All tasks had to be done as quickly as possible in order to make up for my lazy milking, as Zweers now thought. "Give horses water, put the manure in the wheel barrow." Zweers never ran out of orders.

Meanwhile, I heard with pleasure that plates, knives and forks were being put on the table in the kitchen. After my final breakfast at the Dommelhuis (that home suddenly seemed to be farther away than the moon) I had only eaten the piece of rye bread during tea break; I was famished. When I entered the kitchen, I saw for the first time young Barend, a little chap of about six, who did not say a single word, and looked frightened at his father. He was the apple of his mother's eye and stayed as much as possible near or in Aleida's vicinity. His fear for the father was, by the way, without justification because Zweers also adored his only son, but showed this in his own peculiar way. I wondered how these busy people had time to produce a son. Aleida put a pan with steaming potatoes on the table, and a plate with cooked bacon. One could take as much potatoes as wanted, but the bacon was divided by Aleida with great and never failing care. Zweers was served first with a large piece, and I received a smaller one. The two

women received a much smaller piece; finally, young Barend received an even smaller piece, most of which usually ended up on Aleida's plate. I had never eaten cooked bacon before, but hunger is a good cook, and I wolfed down my piece with a large amount of potatoes. Zweers ate quickly without saying a single word and seemed to be elsewhere with his thoughts. Probably he thought about "woak", and soon it became clear that this was indeed the case. After the "potatoes", the main course during lunch and evening meal, Aleida put a bowl with buttermilk porridge on the table. I would have loved to have some sugar in the porridge, but did not dare to ask for it, expecting one or more sarcastic remarks from Zweers. I had not yet finished my porridge, but Zweers already had a number of orders for me. "Churn the third part of the milk, bring the sacks of oats into the stable, feed the pigs." Soon I came to realize that this was not the "welcoming ceremony", but the daily routine. Like the six days of potatoes, bacon and buttermilk porridge (replaced on Sunday by pork and vanilla pudding), also predictable was the working program immediately after each meal.

Zweers took great pleasure to look for all kinds of activity besides the routine jobs; to be honest, he contrived work not only for his farm hand, but also for himself. After only a few days I realized that the man was a workaholic, whose life knew nothing but work, unfortunately interrupted by eating and sleeping. I received explanation of his behavior by remarks made by Aleida, but especially by the old woman, his mother, who provided information bit by bit. Zweers father had worked as a young man on the construction of the railroad track from the town of Zutphen to Arnhem. All this time he had only one dream, to become a farmer. Unfortunately for him it could only be a dream, since he had no financial resources whatsoever. By marrying a girl with some savings and putting away each cent which was not essential for his living, he was able to rent an old farmhouse near the Postbank in the hills of Rhenen, together with some infertile land covered with heather. Moreover, he was offered to rent some pasture land on the banks of the river Yssel, about thirteen kilometers from the farmhouse. The house was in bad condition and had to be repaired in order to stay dry, stables had to be built, and the heather land had to be transformed into fertile ground, as much a

possible under bad conditions. All of this, the old Zweers had to do with his own hands. He had to work day and night nearly literally, in order to survive. "Who goes up into the hills for farming?" asked the people in the neighborhood; neighbors called him "Crazy Barend" from the very beginning, but Zweers' father did not care what others said; he was realizing a dream. By doing this he created a strange type of farming, a picturesque farm situated in woods and heather land, difficult to reach for transport vehicles, and with pastures far away. There was only one way to make such farming profitable, namely by working twice as hard as the usual farmer. His only son, Barend Jr., had to help his father as early as possible and had only learned "woak", and nearly nothing else.

Later in the evening, when little Barend was already in his bed, the family sat together in the only large room, lighted by an old fashioned paraffin lamp. Zweers was in his old worn out easy chair reading a newspaper, and the two women were seated at a table knitting. From a slender white can, Aleida poured coffee. Zweers read for a few minutes, his head started to nod; he was asleep in no time. Soon his loud snoring was the dominating sound in the room. The women seemed to be familiar with this situation, and bowed a little deeper over their knitting without speaking a single word all evening. Most of the time I took the newspaper, which had fallen down, and tried to read. But I was fighting against sleep myself, stimulated even more by Zweer's snoring. After some time Zweers woke with a start and immediately remembered the jobs that had to be done. The horses had to be given water for the night, the milk cans had to be readied for the next morning, and so forth. Around half past nine, the wick of the lamp was turned down as a signal for bedtime. "Nice life in winter, nice life. When cows are out, life is not so lazy, na so lazy. Good night." This was his final remark of the day. I went upstairs, removed my strange clothes, crept under the cold, moist sheets, and was within seconds asleep.

I was shaken by my shoulders, seemingly in the middle of the night and having been asleep only a few minutes; it was actually 5:00 AM in the morning. "Doan, dan't ya hear the alarm clock?", and instead of "good morning", he continued, "ya ere for woak and not far sleep, ya far woak." I was fully overcome by sleep, but Zweers seemed to be fully awake, happy with a new day, even if it

was still pitch-black almost everywhere. I had no idea what time it was. I was stumbling around trying to find the wash basin, a rusty iron bowl which I had filled with water the evening before. However, I had forgotten to ask for a towel. The door of the matrimonial sleeping room was a bit open, and I asked for a towel. After some rumbling, the door was opened and there stood Zweers in his long drawers and a lamp in one hand. With the battlecry "urry up, urry", he threw something in my direction, which had to be a towel. I awakened rapidly by the ice cold water on my face, but in the pitch-darkness I could not wash myself, as I was accustomed to doing.

In the kitchen the old woman had already prepared hot coffee and a pile of sandwiches. From the clock on the wall I learned that it was a few minutes past 5:00 AM. Everybody ate as quick as possible without uttering a single word. During milking, I managed to milk three cows, but despite my efforts, Zweers was still able to produce some milk from the udders of "my" cows, all the time shaking his head dejectedly. The day before proved indeed to have been a "lazy day." Today there was "woak" from 5:00 AM until 9:00 PM with short intervals for the meals. I consumed now a double portion of potatoes and regarded the bacon, which only yesterday I had eaten with some aversion, as a delicacy. In the evening, I understood in a few days only too well why Zweers routinely fell asleep in his easy chair after only a few minutes. In spite of a sufficient amount of food, I went to bed in the evening with a feeling of hunger, and my need for sweets became paramount.

Only on my second evening, I fell asleep at the table with my head on my arms. Never in my life had I worked so hard and so continuously. I fell exhausted into my bed and slept immediately despite the cold sheets; but, after a few hours I became fully awake. My hands were ice cold as though no blood was flowing. I tried to massage clumsily one hand with the other, but I was so tired that I fell asleep again, only to awaken again after a short time. I soon realized that my problem must have been due to the milking. The muscles and tendons must be swollen where they cross over blood vessels, which put pressure on those vessels and hampered the flow of blood into the hands. I sincerely hoped that this discomfort would pass and go unnoticed, but I dared not mention it in the presence of Zweers. A few days later, I approached Aleida, when she was

alone in the kitchen, with my problem. She told me that when she learned to milk as a little girl she had the same symptoms, which diminished and left after some time. I was reassured, but my badly needed night's rest, which was much too short anyway, was again and again unpleasantly interrupted.

With much desire I looked forward to my first Sunday at the farm. The cows had to be milked twice, but there were perhaps a few hours of rest. Saturday evening I put a pail with cold water in the warm stable and started to wash myself as best I could. After this bath, I massaged my painful hands while sitting in the family room, but Zweers did not notice my activity. He was, as usual, deeply asleep. Sunday morning after milking there was a cup of coffee with a slice of currant bread. Zweer's stood up, coughed as though a bit embarrassed, took a thick black pouch out of his trouser pocket, fumbled with his fingers in the pouch, and finally, with a grimace, threw two quarters⁴ on the table. "Ya aren't worth it, na worth." I can see this scene of 50 years ago clearly before me, as if it happened only yesterday. It was the lowest and strangest payday in my entire life. However, the big surprise was still to come! There were on this peaceful Sunday morning, no orders! Zweers was already in the pig shed, where I could hear him pounding with a hammer to repair something. Before he could change his mind and ask for my assistance, I went up to my sleeping corner, now seen for the first time in daylight. I fell down on the unmade bed and was asleep within seconds. Aleida called me for lunch, but immediately after the meal, I went back to my bed and slept until milking time.

During the following days I came to fully realize that Ru Cohen had been right. I had to work hard 16 hours a day and could not imagine keeping up with this for a long time. I approached Aleida carefully by asking for a piece of paper and an envelope. After much fumbling in a drawer of an old cupboard, Aleida finally produced a piece of fairly dirty paper and a crumpled envelope. She did not have a stamp. In the evening, when Zweers was snoring in

⁴ Four Dutch quarters equals one guilder; two quarters equals one-half guilder, the equivalent of \$0.15 U.S.

his easy chair, I wrote a letter to Ru telling him that I had realized how right he had been with his prediction. The work was indeed too hard for me and I proposed to visit his office in order to discuss with him my future possibilities. Staying with Zweers was for me no longer an option. At the moment I finished my letter, Zweers became awake. "Thought already ya can better write than woak, ya write much better. I had learned, however, not to respond to his outpourings. The problem I faced now was how to get a stamp. The postman came daily around noon to deliver the newspaper from the day before. From time to time he also brought a letter, mainly a bill or information from the Farmer's Association.

I had to find a way to meet the postman and to give him money for a stamp. If Zweers suspected my plan or even guessed about the contents of my letter, he would invent all sorts of orders to be carried out far away from the farmhouse. I could, however, see the small road leading to the farm and, as it was close to noon, and the postman could arrive any moment. We were sawing tree trunks in the woods to make firewood. I suddenly feigned abdominal pain and quickly ran to the farmhouse, without waiting for comments from Zweers. I ran into the privy outside the house and climbed on the seat in order to watch the road through the small, dirty window. It had to be close to 12:00 AM, but there was no postman in sight. I could not stay too long in the privy, suspecting that Zweers might come at any moment to look for me. Moreover, shortly after noon we were expected for lunch. As far as I could remember the postman had always arrived at the farm before our meal. But, it was not to happen today. Finally, I saw Zweers walking towards the farmhouse, and only a moment later the postman leaned his bicycle against the cowshed. Happy, I ran outside, gave him my letter, money for a stamp, and an extra 10 cents as a tip. Zweers observed the whole transaction with great interest but without uttering a word. During the meal he looked up from his plate only once, "tummy ache is over, ya, ya, is over."

Waiting for Ru's answer to my letter kept me on my feet the following days. How long was his answer going to take? One day to Deventer, 1 day to think about it and to write an answer, and 1 day back to Worth Rheden. After four days I could probably expect his answer. But on Saturday, the fourth day, there was no letter from Ru. I was now four weeks at the farm; and, besides the Zweers family and the

postman, I had not seen a living soul. In spite of my extreme chronic tiredness, I had the irresistible need to leave the farm for a couple of hours.

After the Saturday evening meal, I collected all my courage by asking Zweers if I might borrow his bicycle in order to go to Arnhem. To my great surprise, he mumbled "ya, ya," took his worn out leather pouch from his pocket and laid out 50 cents on the table without comment. It was already dark and I had forgotten to lower the saddle on the bicycle, which was quite unpleasant on the bumpy sand path. However, it was already late and I had no desire to return. Finally I arrived in Arnhem, where I immediately went to look for a shop selling chocolate, although I realized that most shops would be closed by now. After some search I found a shop with an automatic machine, from which, after putting in 10 cents, one could draw a bar of chocolate. I bought six bars, looked around a bit, but realized the time was short in order to be back at the farm before 10:00 PM. I just had left Arnhem behind me, when one of my bicycle tires went flat. What to do? Where to find late on a Saturday evening somebody to repair this tube? Moreover, I had spent nearly all of my money for chocolate. There was only one solution, and that was to walk home.

I arrived at the totally darkened farmhouse in the middle of the night and soaked with sweat. Perhaps Zweers had left a door open for me; but no, all doors were firmly closed. What to do now? To awaken the family was the last thing I wanted to do. And even if so, how should I do it realizing that all the Zweers were in a deep sleep. I went to the barn where I knew there was an old carriage covered with a filthy and dirty horse blanket. I lied down in the carriage and covered my damp body with the blanket, which I now found was smeared with manure. For a short moment I thought about the rats, which I had seen many times around the barn, but I was too tired to care about them and immediately fell into a deep sleep. I also put the bicycle into the barn so Zweers could not immediately see if I had returned. Perhaps he thought I had run away, which from my point of view, would have been quite understandable. Around noon he entered the barn, saw his bicycle and found me asleep in the carriage. He shook me awake and said only, "time to eat." I went quickly to wash myself and to put on clean clothes. The chocolate bars, which I obtained with such great effort, I put under the pillow on my bed. Not a

word was said during the meal, which I considered more offending than a rebuke. Finally I told the family what had happened, how I had to walk home, and my decision not to wake up the whole family. Aleida looked frightened at her husband, waiting for his comment. But Zweers had attention only for his Sunday piece of meat. Not a single word was said further about the incident. After the meal I went up to my bed and ate a couple of chocolate bars, of which I had dreamed for a couple of weeks. After a short time I fell on my bed and immediately fell asleep.

On Monday, there was still no letter from Ru and the same was true the following days. Only Friday at noon I found a letter near my plate on the table. Although everybody was served and eating, I had first to read the letter. This was done in a few seconds, since there was only one sentence which said, "Leo Reichenberger would visit me soon." Not a word about my cry of distress, no mention that I need to speak to him urgently. Leo will come, shalom, Ru. It was like a telegram. Although Zweers was totally absorbed by his meal, he could not resist to look out of the corner of his eyes in the direction of the letter near my plate. Boldly, I put the letter near his plate. He did not look at it and feigned to be busy with his potatoes and bacon. "Ya, ya", was his short comment after taking the letter in his hands, reading it far away from his eyes and returning it near my plate. Aleida meanwhile moved uneasily on her chair, probably full of curiosity. Since she had helped me

with paper and envelope I felt obliged to help her. 'Mister Reichenberger will visit one of these days', I said. Everybody was again busy with the buttermilk porridge.

Instead of the postman I now eagerly waited for Leo and permanently sharpened my ears to hear the sound of Leo's motorbicycle. There had been a long period of dry weather, and one could certainly drive over the sand path. The days passed with the monotony of the heavy routine work. I had to set my teeth, I had to be patient and strong at the same time. Leo will come and with him a solution for all of my problems. Perhaps he would take me with the suitcase pinched between us on his motor bicycle. But where to? Every place would be fine with me, as long as it was far away from Zweers. About 10 days after I had received Ru's letter, and when I was coming home with a load of trunks, I saw Leo's bicycle leaning against the wall of the farmhouse.

Leo shook my hand and asked me how I was doing, as if he did not know the whole story. When I tried to explain the situation with a flood of words, he patted my shoulder: "courage" he said, "courage." Zweers greeted Leo and asked him to come into the house. I followed only to learn soon that the invitation did not include Zweers' farm hand. "orse in the stable, trunks off, water for the pigs," were the orders for me. I was just unloading the last trunk with great care in order not have one fall on my feet, when I noticed Leo coming up in my direction.

It was a problem, he said. He fully understood, that I regarded the work as very heavy. When I told him that this was an understatement and described my 16 hour work days he looked somewhat absent into the distance. Considering carefully what to say, he finally mumbled, "Ya, we will have to look for another farm for you." I asked if I could not be moved to the Wieringen Centre. "No," said Leo, "this is not that easy. You have chosen for Einzel-Hachshara⁵ and to stop working after such a short time is even for Wieringen not a good recommendation. We shall look for another farm, one where you do not have to work that hard." "How long is this going to take?", I asked bashfully, while the image of Leo with me behind him on the bike became more and more hazy. "We are doing our best. You are going to hear from us. All the best. Shalom." Before I realized it, the conversation was over and Leo was on his bike, and became smaller and smaller in the distance. I wanted to run after him: I wanted to say, that this could not go on, that I wanted to leave with him, today. Zweers stood in the open door and asked a bit amused, "are the trunks off the wagon?" I had no idea what Leo and Zweers had discussed; certainly not the amount of work I had to do, since nothing changed during the coming days. I even doubted, if Zweers was able to reduce my exertion or reduce the tempo. He was not able to do this for himself and certainly did not know how to apply this to his farmhand.

The first Saturday after Leo had been here revealed a result of Leo's visit. Zweers took out his pouch, searched in it with his fingers and finally produced one guilder, which he placed, triumphantly, on the table- a

⁵ See chapter 4, footnote 9.

wage increase of 100%! I had never before or thereafter enjoyed such an increase! But this was not the only surprise. After some sauntering he turned around when he reached the door and said, "if ya wanna go to town, I ave lowered the saddle of the bicycl." This was the only friendly remark I was to hear during my whole stay at Zweers' farm. Probably, Leo had told Zweers how bitterly I wanted to leave. If so, Zweers might have realized that a farm hand working 16 hours a day for 50 cents a week was a good buy even at double that amount.

One week passed and then another without a word from either Leo or from Ru. How to cope with this unpleasant situation? Being in Arnhem one Saturday evening, I sat down on a bench in a park and tried to evaluate my dilemma. I certainly had not realized that the work would be so hard, and would bring me to the edge of my power of endurance. While eating a chocolate bar (the main reason to go to town was to buy some chocolate), I saw a telephone box in front of me. Something had to happen; I had to undertake some activity before starting a new week at the farm. I could telephone Ru Cohen. I had the telephone number of his office, but there likely was no one to answer on Saturday evening. I still could try it, and, within a second, Ru was on the phone. I was so surprised, that I needed time to recover and to find my words. Clumsy and excited, I told him of Leo's visit and his promise to look for another farm for me. "And," said Ru in his abrupt way, "that's exactly where we are at the present time." "How long might this take?" I asked meekly. "No idea", mused Ru, "we do our best." I had the feeling to have been put off with promises again. From the telephone box I saw the activities in the street; cars, bicycles, people laughing and enjoying themselves. At the same time, I saw images before my eyes; the farm, Zweers, the cow shed, my bed behind the curtain, the shabby carpet.... "I want to talk to you as soon as possible" was the last desperate comment I made. Ru must have picked up the urgency in my voice. "OK, I have to see when this might be possible. You will hear from me. Shalom." I heard the click of his telephone being laid down. I consumed a few chocolate bars and started my return to the farm.

Wednesday noon a letter was near my plate at lunchtime. In it was a train ticket and a letter with one sentence: "Will see you this Friday at 11:00 AM". Before ladling my

potatoes I said, "I have to be in Deventer Friday morning". Zweers looked at me with squeezed eyes, and wanted to say something; but he changed his mind and returned full attention to his meal. Only when the porridge arrived he said without looking in my direction, "Ya, ya, has to be done, ya, ya." No further word was said concerning my forthcoming trip to Deventer. It seemed to be evident that I would have to help milking on Friday morning. My excitement and expectation with regard to my forthcoming discussion with Ru was paramount in my mind. One could feel the tension and Zweers said even less words than the few he ordinarily spoke in a day, and those were entirely related to work. I had decided immediately after milking to wash up, put on my best clothes, eat a quick breakfast and leave. If Zweers would not agree, I would just decide at the time how to proceed. When I entered the kitchen in my unusual outfit, the whole family was gathered around the table for breakfast. Not a single word was said when I left the room, taking with me a few sandwiches. I had to run down all the way to the main street and take a bus to the Arnhem railway station. I had no idea if I could meet my 11:00 appointment in Ru's office. With effort and fast running I succeeded to be in Ru's office at half past eleven. I apologized for being late and tried to explain the reason, but Ru paid no attention. He went up briefly to his living quarters to get a cup of coffee for me.

"If we want to build up Erez Israel, if we want to have our own homeland, we need pioneers who are prepared to give their full devotion." It was the longest sentence I have ever heard spoken by Ru and I was quite familiar with these ideological slogans. We had heard this in the Zionist youth movement, day by day, but in recent months I had not found enough time for this kind of deliberations. I had barely realized for what higher goals I was at Zweers' farm. The hard work, the daily effort and the chronic exhaustion were all I was able to think of. I tried to explain this to Ru, telling him of my daily schedule, and my still interrupted sleep at night due to my swollen and bloodless hands. He heard it all, but I was not sure if he realized all that I wanted to tell him. He let me talk for almost half an hour without interrupting me. Finally he got up to pour another cup of coffee for me. "I told you all of this," was his only comment. "What to do now?", I asked under great tension. "Wait until we have found another farm for you; try

to keep it up for a while." I now realized that my trip to Deventer had been useless. What could I do? What more was there to say? "I hope to hear from you soon," were the only words I could stammer, totally disappointed. "Thank you for the coffee. Shalom." Ru escorted me to the door, without saying a single word.

It was a beautiful warm spring day with a cloudless blue sky. Before taking the bus, I could have strolled through the town, seeing open shops in Arnhem for the first time in months. I would have done so, had I known at this moment, that I would not have a chance to walk lightheartedly in a town for many years to come. But now I only wanted to return to the farm. Was I already contaminated by Zweers' mania for "woak"?

Arriving at the farm, there was no one to see. I put on my working clothes and took part in the daily life, as if I had not been away for the greater part of the day. Before the milking we had tea, but no one asked about my trip, and I had little to tell about it anyway. Aleida would certainly have been pleased to hear of my experiences, but with Zweers around she hardly dared to open her mouth. In the evening, after Zweers had his nap in his easy chair and had dropped the newspaper, he sat straight up and said solemnly, "Cows go out Monday mornin'." And since nobody gave any comment to this statement, he repeated, "ya, ya, is goin to appen." Within the minute he was asleep again.

Monday morning after the milking, the ropes with which the cows were fastened in the stable were undone, and the cows were brought to the path leading to the farm. The carriage with the horse was ready in front of the barn. We all, including young Barend, had sticks in our hands in order to keep the cows in check, which were quite excited, after having been in the dark stable for several months. With the young and the old Zweers on the sides and myself at the rear, we were driving the cows while Aleida followed in the carriage. It was quite easy until we reached the main road, but there it became difficult due to passing traffic. Zweers and Aleida tried to stop cars and bicycles in both directions, while young Barend and I tried to cross the road with the cows. They were frightened by the unusual noises and objects and it was only with considerable effort that we were able to lead them to the other side of the road. We soon reached a narrow dike along the river Yssel. Here the cows became even more excited by trying

constantly to pluck some fresh grass; but, after nearly an hour we finally arrived at the pastures. With the carriage we all drove home. Upon arrival at the farm, Zweers excitedly spoke two full sentences: "Doan, ya go in the mornin and afternoon with the bike and fasten the cows up for milking, we follow with the carriage. Ya do it every mornin and afternoon; ya, every mornin and afternoon."

The bicycle ride a few hours later in the warm sunshine on the dike was a pleasant change, although I would change my mind about the twice daily trip very soon. The following day Zweers had to shake me awake, just as on my first day. The routine meanwhile became, that after awakening, Zweers would throw one of his wooden shoes in my direction. Most of the time the shoe landed on the wall and fell on my bed, although a few times the shoe hit my head. For this reason, I had learned to sleep behind a large pillow, shielding me from the expected projectile. This morning, however, I had not noticed the wooden shoe, being still in a deep sleep. When I came into the kitchen, I saw that it was not yet even four o'clock. "Summertime", mumbled Zweers, "be on ya way to the cows." Outside and more so in the woods, it was still dark and only when arriving on the shore of the river was I able to see the surroundings. The cows were usually at the rear of the large pasture, deep in the long wet grasses. My socks above my wooden shoes and the legs of my trousers were regularly soaked in the wet grass, due to the morning dew or from time to time the rain. During milking time I had to walk around for a few hours in my wet clothes. The picturesque trip along the river, however pleasant, had now made my working day 17 hours, instead of the usual 16 hours. Many times I fell asleep on the bicycle and fell off, thankfully always to the land and not to the riverside. Several times I hurt myself rather badly, and therefore I tried to whistle, to sing, to talk to myself, but usually without success. Again and again, I fell asleep.

Approximately 10 days after my visit to Deventer, I received a letter from Leo. He was busy looking for another farm, and he hoped to inform me soon about his success. When bicycling to the pasture in the morning a few days later, I heard many aeroplanes in the sky. This had happened several times during recent weeks, but my attention was not drawn to them. When Zweers and Aleida arrived with the wagonette and unloaded the milking utensils, the air

traffic became heavier. "Must be the Krauts," said Zweers as he shoved the first pail between his knees and under the first cow. Only when returning home after milking did I several times notice people standing in groups and looking excitedly at the sky.

I soon got the information: Germany had invaded Holland during this night of May 10, 1940. There was a war going on. The aeroplanes were German, many with parachutists, who had descended in order to occupy the Rhine bridges in Arnhem. The wildest of rumors were circulating, and everyone was excited. One person believed he had seen German soldiers; another had heard on a radio that thousands of parachutists were coming down all over Holland. I bicycled to the farm, where there were duties to carry out before breakfast. When I heard the wagon arriving, I ran outside to help with the full milk cans. "It is war. The Germans have invaded Holland!", I shouted excitedly. "Ya, ya" said Zweers calmly, "ad to appen. Krauts will be boss soon." "Wait a moment, there still is Dutch resistance," I tried to convince myself. "a few days and Krauts stay at our door," said Zweers stoically. I was not in for further discussion with Zweers, because I did not like his assessment. Even Aleida was excited and said during breakfast, "There is war going on, mother," said at the farm during this historic day, a day which was to influence my whole future. In the family room was an old radio, but it did not work, as I had heard from Aleida long ago. When would the Zweers have found time to listen to a radio?

A few days later the postman brought a number of newspapers, together with the extra editions regarding the events of the war. Up in the hills we did not see or hear much of these events. The news arrived only with yesterday's newspaper. From time to time I picked up a few remarks on my way to or from the pastures. There was now much more traffic on the main road. There were cars, horses and wagons, and people with bicycles packed with luggage, telling us that they came running out of Arnhem where there was heavy fighting going on. A day later I heard that Holland had capitulated, and after another day, there were announcements in German and Dutch posted on public buildings, signed by the chief commander of the German occupation force. These said that people must be calm, to not resist German orders, and to carry on with their daily activities. The next day early in the morning, I met on the

main road, endless columns of military wagons drawn by horses with German soldiers, mostly elderly men. The wagons were covered with gray canvas, and the horses trudged as though tired, like they had been a long time underway. On the same day, up in the hills, I met a car with German soldiers, busily orienting themselves with a staff map. One of them asked me where the sand path lead to; embarrassed and without thinking, I answered in German with my Viennese accent. Fortunately, they were too busy to notice this.

At the farm, Leo was waiting for me. I was very surprised to see him so suddenly. "How are you doing?", he asked with a serious face. I supposed that he was referring to my difficulties with Zweers; but, as we sat down, he told me he was visiting all pioneers, often under difficult circumstances. Only later I learned how he had managed to go with his motorbike through the front lines, narrowly escaping death on several occasions. His only goal was to report to Ru, that all pioneers were safe. Leo was depressed and quite negative about the future, saying, that we had to wait and see what was going to happen. I had been totally consumed by my own problems, and so far had not realized what a German occupation could and would mean, especially for us Jews. Zweers joined us and I left in order to give both men an opportunity to talk to each other. Before leaving, Leo came into the barn, where I was at work: "Ru and I realize what a hard time you have," he said, "I may soon have another farm for you, but under the present circumstances, this may take a bit longer than expected. Be patient and try to cope with it." I was happy that he had given me an indication of hope before leaving.

After May 10, 1940, a lot changed in Holland, but not at Zweers' farm. We still arose before 4:00 AM and went to bed, already half asleep, by about 10:00 PM. The only difference was, even though tired, I forced myself to read the newspaper each evening. I had to know what was going on in the outside world, as I was convinced that one day, I would have to again deal with the outside world. Once or twice in the evening, Aleida looked at me compassionately, and when Zweers snorted deeply, she dared to ask, "Do you have family? Where are they at present?" Once, Zweers became awake and heard us whisper. "Ya, ya", he said, "ya toak better than ya woak. Ya should become a lawyer, a lawyer, ya, ya." After this unusually long statement, he

left for his sleeping room, followed meekly by Aleida, who humped her shoulder in my direction with an excusing look.

The historic month of May, 1940 passed. Without realizing it, my body became used to the hard work and the extraordinary circumstances. I probably had become stronger and the urgency to leave Zweers and his farm had lessened somewhat since the first months. There was a permanent lack of sleep, and I still wanted to leave Zweers as soon as possible, but the near panic was over. Moreover, at night I no longer had cold hands due to the milking.

There were numerous events in Holland and in the world, as I learned from the daily newspaper. But up in the hills life remained unchanged, so far. On the farm we had no impression of living in an occupied country. Sometimes I had the feeling of being on an island, which provided some security, and which I should not leave for the time being. In the middle of June, I received a message from Leo informing me that he had found another farm for me and that I would hear more very soon.

A few weeks later he visited again, this time even more depressed than during his last visit. All pioneers were still at work, but his view of the future was very negative. The Germans were successful on all fronts, and the war could go on for a long time. My new farm was at Wiene, a hamlet not far from Hengelo in the eastern part of Holland. Leo would inform me about the day of departure, and would bring me to the family Wijnbergen at Wiene; I did not know if he had meanwhile informed Zweers about my departure. I did not mention it during the following days, and Zweers made no remark about this news, exactly as I would expect.

The week passed in a nearly unrealistic state of calmness. Holland and many other European countries were occupied by German troops. Hitler was successful on all fronts; people were trying to escape to England. The Bekanntmachungen⁶ from the German occupation forces became more and more threatening, all the time forbidding this or that, and announcing special regulations for Jews. From time to time, there was an announcement that a number of people, identifying their full name and address, were

⁶ Announcements

executed due to resistance activities. Zweers read the newspaper in the evening, devoting more time to this task, but he never gave any comment; this despite my efforts to start a discussion about certain news items. Since I now had to wait a bit longer for the newspaper, I remained downstairs after the Zweers had departed for their bedroom in order to read the newspaper, fighting against sleep all the time. I did not hear from Leo for weeks. What had happened? If he had found a new farm for me, what would be easier than to pack my few possessions and to leave?

I did not wait as eagerly as during the first months for the postman or for the sound of Leo's motor bicycle, but since there was a new address at hand, I still wanted to leave Zweers behind me as soon as possible. At the middle of July, I received a letter from Ru informing me, that Leo would come at the end of next week in order to take me to my new address. With the same mail, Zweers received a letter from the Deventer Association probably informing him about my forthcoming departure. Zweers tore the letter open, read it, put it in his pocket, and turned his attention to his meal without uttering a single word. On the evening before my departure, I had my suitcase packed and sat in my neat suit in the family room. After a long period of silence I finally said: "That was it. Tomorrow morning Mr. Reichenberger comes for me and I will not join you for the milking". "Ya, ya" was Zweers only comment. Aleida looked at me and I thought, or at least wanted to believe, that I saw tears in her eyes. More than five months I had every evening been in this room; in that time, hardly 100 words had been spoken, and there had never been a visitor.

The following morning Leo arrived early, even before the Zweers were home from milking. He asked me if I wanted to wait for their return, but I had no desire to do so. Since it was Friday I told Leo that I would miss my weekly payment of one guilder, which was paid each Saturday. For Leo this was no problem and he gave me the guilder I was going to miss. I said goodbye to the old woman and gave young Barend a handshake. We departed in the same way we arrived, on the bicycle with my suitcase clenched between us. Before reaching the main road, we met the break carriage with Zweers and Aleida. Leo stopped, but Zweers, being totally embarrassed, drove on and even whipped the horse in order to proceed faster. I did not say a word, the

incident spoke for itself, and Leo could conclude for himself about the farmer with whom I had spent more than five months.

Much later, I was elected as a representative of the pioneers into the Board of the Deventer Association, and, only then, did I realize what really had happened. Ru Cohen was a perfectionist wanting to send to Palestine only thoroughly educated and strong pioneers; this goal he achieved with great success. In Israel, there is in the kibbutz Beth Hashita, a house named after and in memory of Ru Cohen, a great Zionist. In order to reach his goal, Ru had to select pioneers, who were prepared to give their full devotion and even more, as I had experienced during my "training." To test the candidates, the association had three or four addresses of farmers, where the work load was far heavier than on the average Dutch farm. One of these farmers, probably the most notorious, was Zweers at Worth Rheden. In nearly all cases the pioneers tried to leave after a few weeks. The game played by Ru was to hold the candidates on a string and to see how long they would stick to their tasks, without giving up completely. If one persisted for five or six months, he or she⁷ were considered to have passed the "examination." Such a pioneer was very likely to encounter the harshest of circumstances in Palestine.

Epilogue?

After the war, I visited with veterinarians at various kibbutzim in Israel and met a number of pioneers, who had acquired their training with the Deventer Association. Nearly all of them had leading positions in agriculture and husbandry, several being chief of stables having a large number of cows. They received widespread respect due to their effort and knowledge.

On one occasion since, I have met Zweers and Aleida. On a beautiful summer day, in the early 1980's, I had to attend an evening meeting at the Agricultural

⁷ Girls were also trained on farms.

University at Wageningen, where I worked as a part time Professor. There was not enough time to drive to my home, only to return to Wageningen for the meeting. Spontaneously, I decided to drive to the farm, which was located less than half an hour from Wageningen. I do not know why I did this. For years, I had not thought about this period of my life, but suddenly I saw the farm before me. When I opened the door in the fence and drove up to the farm I saw an old woman sitting on a bench in front of the entrance to the kitchen. Aleida immediately recognized me, after 40 years had passed. She asked a young woman, who was busy in the kitchen, to bring us some tea. The young woman had to be young Barend's wife. I just answered a few questions for Aleida, when a carriage with two men on it came out of the woods. While young Barend unloaded the milk cans, Zweers came walking in our direction. Other than deeper wrinkles in his face, and an even more knotty expression, it was the same Zweers I knew 40 years ago. Even the same greasy and dirty small hat wobbled on his head. "You recognize me?", I asked. "Ya, ya remember ya" he grumbled, and wanted to leave right away. "That's Doan," said Aleida, "he is now a Professor at Wageningen." "Ya, ya, always knew he ad to be a lawyer. Talks nice, better than woaks." After the great effort to speak so many words, it was now certainly time to leave. If he would have said, "Doan elp takin the cans from the carriage and do this and do that," I probably would have done it. Aleida asked if I wanted to come in. Yes, I wanted to see the family room. Nothing had been changed during 40 past years, only a radio with two boxes stood on a side table. The easy chair was even more worn out, and the carpet on the floor badly needed replacement. "Visit us one day with your family", said Aleida with little enthusiasm. I wished her all the best. Zweers, by this time, was nowhere to be seen. When driving away, I saw a face peering through the small, dirty window in the cow shed. A face displaying a false grin, the hat wobbling on his head, the few remaining teeth sticking out from the half opened mouth.

So he remains in my memory.

Chapter 6

In Granny's Care

What a difference from my last trip with A Leo! Again, I sat behind him on his motorbicycle, again with the old suitcase pinched between us. It was at the end of July, top of the summer, and pretty hot. The sun shone on the ripe crops in the fields, and from time to time through the branches of the luxuriant, deciduous trees along the roads we drove. After all the months up in the hills at Zweer's farm, I enjoyed tremendously the beautiful landscape, which I had not seen earlier. If the dark clouds of the German occupation had not been above us and, moreover, my uncertainty what to expect at my new employer's, it would have been a beautiful trip on a perfect summer day. At about noon, we reached a bridge over a canal, and Leo said: "Now we are there in a few minutes." We drove into the hamlet Wiene between the towns Goor and Hengelo, past a farmhouse which also served as a pub, and drove further on a small sand road. A few moments later we were at the farm yard of the family Wijnbergen. The motor bicycle was not even turned off when the big door of the farmhouse flew open, and there was the whole family - an elderly couple, a young couple, and two small boys.

Granny, with a blue spotless apron around her bulky belly, was the first to greet us: "So, laddie, here you are finally. We already have been waiting for you for nearly one hour." By saying this, she threw her strong arms around me and gave me a firm kiss on both cheeks, while the other members of the family took my suitcase and helped me to get off the bike. Leo had totally fallen into the background, but grandpa Wijnbergen, contrary to his wife a small, lanky mannikin, approached him: "We are so glad with the new farmhand that we seem to forget about you. Please come in, Mr. Reichenberger." What a reception! What a difference compared to Zweer's welcome! In the rear of the stable, which was now empty, stood a round table with on it plates and forks and knives. Granny took a big pot with steaming

potatoes from the cooker, while the young woman put on the table a dish with meat and another dish with apple sauce. "Come on, lads, don't wait for an invitation, sit down and take what you want," said Granny. All of us sat down around the table, but Leo nor I myself had much time to eat, due to the continuous stream of questions from Granny. Where did we come from, what route had we taken, whether we had found the farm easily, did I enjoy my stay at the previous farm, where did I come from originally, and so on, and so on? Granny was the spokeswoman, the leader of the family, a relationship which became apparent within only a few minutes.

From time to time the young couple, Gerrit and Aafje, looked curiously in my direction, and only when Granny kept silent for a moment, Gerrit, who after all was the farmer, dared to ask about my work experience. We sat, pleasantly chatting, for more than an hour around the table, and if Leo had not announced that he had to leave, the meal session would have taken even longer. But before leaving, Leo had absolutely to eat a large bowl of buttermilk porridge. "Take some more, Mr. Reichenberger, we are so glad that you have brought us the lad," said Granny. Leo said goodbye, with a smile in my direction as if he wanted to say: "So, lad, you have been quite lucky with your new home."

The whole family went outside with Leo, and although Leo needed all his attention to stay on the bumpy sand road and could not turn his head around, all of them were waving and calling good wishes till he was out of sight. "Come on, Gerrit," said Granny, "show the lad around, you have all the time before milking the cows. With Gerrit and the two boys, who still looked at me with curiosity, we walked into a fruit orchard, where mainly plum trees were growing. One of the boys climbed in no time into a big tree, and returned with two big, yellow plums, which he offered me somewhat bashfully. When telling Gerrit and the boys how much I liked the plums, while the juice of the ripe fruit dripped from my mouth, Gerrit wanted to fetch more plums for me, and only by referring to the rich meal we just had, could I prevent his intention. From the orchard one walked immediately into the pastures, where the cows could be seen grazing not far away. All of their land was intact, so the farm was one large plot, and any point could be reached within ten minutes. When I told Gerrit about my experiences at Worth Rheden, he could scarcely believe me.

Milking cows that were located half an hour away from the farm, he never had heard of such a thing. "It's nice here," he said, somewhat sadly, "unfortunately it will only be for a short time now." When he saw my puzzled look, he continued: "Our lease contract will expire this coming October, and we will have to move to another farm at Oele, near the town of Hengelo, about 10 kilometers from here. In the beginning of October we will move, which means a lot of work for which we have asked the help of a farm hand. I realized, that my stay at Wiene would be a short one, and I was already now sorry to have to leave these beautiful surroundings.

Later that afternoon Aafje, Gerrit and I myself went out to milk the cows, which was, compared with my former experience, again a surprise. Each of us milked four to five cows, and in the turn of a hand, we were ready. The pigs and the horses were fed, and some other duties were carried out. Since the elderly couple had also done some work, we sat around the large round table for dinner at about 7:00 PM. After the meal we played games with the boys, while Grandpa listened all the time to the radio, which was fed by batteries since the farm was not connected to the electricity network. Later in the evening we read the newspaper, while the women were busy with their needlework. Grandpa was very much interested in the news, and in everything related to the war. Soon he discovered that the new farmhand was an important source of background information with regard to the events in the world and in Europe particularly. In many aspects our views were similar, but we had a significant difference of opinion with regard to the duration of the war. Grandpa was afraid that Germany might win the war soon, which would mean a very dark future, especially for the occupied countries. My view that the war might go on for years, perhaps till 1945, and that Germany would be defeated, especially with the help of the USA, was called by Grandpa "wishful thinking, and totally in conflict with reality. When I visited the family, a few times after the war, Grandpa who was meanwhile passed 80 but still very much interested in world events, used to say, over and over again: "Laddie, you have been right, you have been right all the time. You saw the war in the right perspective, you were right - thank God!".

Around 10:00 PM preparations were made for the night. I had a small room with a window, which provided a

view into the orchard. There was a bed with a checkered eiderdown and a similar pillow, a bedside cabinet, a table with a wash basin and a water jug, and a small wardrobe. Here all my possessions and clothes had been properly put away. Granny had taken care of my suitcase during milking time. Triumphantly, she told me that half of my clothes were already put away for cleaning and mending. When I took off my clothes and went into bed, the door of my room was slowly opened. "So, laddie, said Granny, I am going to tuck you in, and this she did every evening during my whole stay with the Wijnbergen family. When I returned home from time to time quite late after a pioneers' meeting in the nearby town, Granny used to sit at the round table, half sleeping, with her head on her arms. She could not go to bed if she had not tucked in her lads, which were her grandsons and one lucky farmhand.

The following morning I was fully awake at 4:00 AM, as used during recent months with Zweers. With the exception of the warble of the birds, coming in through the half-open window, there was silence. Only about 6:00 AM I heard a knock on my door together with the sounds of a new day. First we went milking, and then we had our breakfast. Granny prepared each morning lovely pancakes made from buckwheat, which we ate with much apple syrup. Everything was calm, nobody was in a hurry and everybody was relaxed; I did not know that farming could be done also in this way. For me the work was easy and not tiring at all, since I was used to another tempo and to a much heavier workload. After the months with Zweers the first weeks with the Wijnbergens looked like a holiday stay on a farm.

Already soon after my arrival there was more and more talking about the forthcoming move and plans were discussed with regard to transporting the household effects, farm tools and the animals. Gerrit took me for a visit to the new place, where also the farm land and pastures surrounded the farm house. However, it was not at all the idyllic situation with an orchard and woods as at Wiene. Again and again, Gerrit emphasized the great workload, which would have to be carried out in coming months. I did not expect any problems, as far as I myself was concerned. The work at the Zweers' farm had been so intensive and so hard, that there was no room at all for any other activity. With "Granny" (nobody said "with the Wijnbergens") the work was a kind of game. It had to be done, but without any

exaggeration. Everybody, young and old, had his or her task, and if one performed that task there was no problem whatsoever. Now I had the time to follow the news about the war and especially about the measures carried out by the German occupation government. At Zweers' farm, I nearly lived in total isolation. At that place, there was no time for news, but here at Granny's there was a permanent flow of news by radio, newspaper, and especially by all kind of suppliers or visitors who came to the farm. Some weeks after my arrival the Wijnbergens organized a special evening for their neighbors, who were expected to help with the forthcoming move. There was not only a lot of food, but also a great quantity of alcoholic beverages. The days after the party Granny used to repeat over and over again: "Oh boy, what could those folks booze, although during that evening she had encouraged her guests to take more drinks all the time. Everybody was interested to see the new farmhand and wanted to talk with me, since they had heard that I "did not talk like the folks around here. "A Jewish boy, said an old farmer, "I don't believe that the Jews are approaching a pretty future. Till late in the evening there was talking, laughing and coming forward with all kinds of rumors.

Gerrit wanted to speak with the neighbors only about the forthcoming move, but Grandpa rather preferred to discuss the war situation with them and to hear their views. Granny, as always like a commander, oversaw the party, heard probably every word that was spoken, but did not participate in the men's discussions, like all the other women. The men did the talking, and the women just sat there, in their best clothes, listening and from time to time shaking their heads or nodding in agreement, indicating that they were well aware about what was said. Only when the men left to have a look at the tools, which were to be moved soon, the women made up for the lost time. Each woman wanted to tell something or to ask a question, but now Granny took the reins in her hands and led the discussion into the direction she wanted. If the women did not know it already, everyone could see now who was the boss on the Wijnbergen farm. I listened with great interest in order to understand the way of life of this farm community. What a difference between Wien (Vienna) and Wiene!

At the beginning of October the whole family, but above all Granny, became more and more nervous about the forthcoming move. Finally the great day was there.

Immediately after milking time, the neighbors arrived with their horse drawn carriages, and Gerrit (who had thought about it for weeks), tried to organize the loading. He succeeded only for a short time, since Granny, who was in the house, the stable, the barn and everywhere at nearly the same time, took over and told the men what to do. Around 11:00 AM everything was on the carriages, and the caravan started to move. Twenty minutes later there was a stop in front of a pub. Gerrit and one of the servants stood ready with trays on which were glasses of brandy. Everybody took one or two glasses before moving on. This ceremony was repeated several times on our way to the new farm at Oele, where we arrived in the afternoon. Without the assistance of the neighbors the move would be never had been possible in one day. There was an unwritten law in this community to help a neighbor under all circumstances. Today, this was brought into practice. At the yard in front of the new farm again a number of brandies was distributed, and everybody wished the Wijnbergens a happy and healthy stay in the new home. Then, all goods were unloaded and put in their proper places, till late in the evening. Granny had now taken over full command, indicating what had to be where, necessarily so since Gerrit and the other man by now were quite tipsy. Granny was immediately at home at the new place, and knew already each corner of the farm. I returned with the neighbors, who first had their carriages unloaded, to Wiene in order to milk the cows, which were brought over in cattle wagons later that evening. Since on this special day I had to milk the cows alone, a number which I had to milk with Zweers twice a day, Granny gave me a special present a few days later - a new pair of Manchester trousers.

I remained nearly one year with the Wijnbergens, a relatively calm year. The work was easy and I did it with pleasure, also because I received full appreciation from the family. Only Gerrit seemed not to be too happy with the fact that Granny treated me more and more as her third grandchild. Aafje did not care much about it but with Gerrit it provoked a feeling of jealousy. Since he could not show his displeasure against his mother, for whom he was afraid, I was the target of his aggression. His jealousy became even more serious due to the fact that Grandpa and I discussed daily not only the war events but also the political world situation, a discussion which Gerrit could hardly follow. Especially Hitler's invasion into the Soviet Union in the

summer of 1941 was a never ending topic for Grandpa. Now he was for the first time not so sure about the German victory. "This lump may be too much for the Krauts to swallow, was his often repeated evaluation. Also about the duration of the war he was now less optimistic, although he could not agree with me that this was only the beginning of a long conflict. At Oele one did not see or feel much of the German occupation during 1941. From the newspaper, however, one could learn that the Germans moved slowly and carefully to get a grip on the public. From time to time measures against the Jews were published, like pinpricks. Among other measures, Jews were no longer allowed to visit cinemas or public parks. A Jewish farmhand at Oele was not much affected by these measures. Only later I realized that 1941 was the calm before the storm.

In the spring of 1942 the Germans issued an order which worried me much more than anything that had happened so far. All Jews were obliged to wear the so-called Star of David on their jackets, blouses or coats. This was a yellow star, made from cotton materials, within its middle the word "JOOD¹" in black letters. I never wore this star, realizing all the time what the consequences would be if discovered by German officials or their Dutch henchmen who were often even more aggressive than their German bosses.

Every 14 days the pioneers had a meeting on Sunday afternoon in a small room in a coffee house in Hengelo. There were approximately 20 boys and five or six girls, the majority being farmhands in this part of the country. We exchanged our experiences as far as our daily work was concerned. We discussed the war situation and especially the German measures against the Jews. However, there was also joking and singing together. During one of these meetings a comrade pioneer showed a photograph of a meeting of young Zionists which had taken place a few months earlier, somewhere in the western part of Holland. On this photo I recognized the girl, Fritzi Prüfer, whom I had visited at Scheveningen in 1938 shortly after my arrival in Amsterdam. The pioneer was able to inform me that due to German orders prohibiting Jews to live near the coast, the

1

Jew

family had moved to Zeist, a village not far from Utrecht in the middle of Holland. He did not know Fritzi's address, but promised me to bring it with him during our next meeting. So he did and I came in contact again with the girl which I knew so well from the Zionist youth group in Vienna. After having made contact with her, she invited me to visit her at Zeist. I accepted the invitation gladly, although there was a problem. I did not have the money for the train, and even more complicated, Jews were not allowed to travel by train without a special permit.

After having studied the map of Holland in one of the atlases of the Wijnbergen children, and after having asked Grandpa if I might use his bicycle, I left on a Saturday afternoon for a trip of several hours. I felt happy with the Wijnbergens, but after some months I was keen to see other sceneries than only the farm and the street, mostly empty, from Hengelo to Haaksbergen. In order to visit Fritzi, I had to cycle more than 80 kilometers on a Saturday afternoon, and to return the same 80 kilometers on Sunday afternoon, quite a distance in little more than 24 hours. Moreover, the tires of the bicycle were in bad shape. I continued with these cycling tours every three weeks till the summer of 1942. After the introduction of the order to wear the Star of David, the many hours on the public roads were quite dangerous due to the fact that I consistently refused to wear the Star. The Wijnbergen family as well as later the family of the farmer in Hengelo showed full appreciation for my trips, since "going steady" with a girl was fully accepted in their culture. Moreover, both families had much respect for my weekend efforts after a whole week of not too heavy but still hard farm work. After the introduction of the Star, my trips were not only a physical strain, but also a mental one due to the increasing inspections and other measures on the public roads. Good or bad weather, I had to visit Fritzi and her parents at least once every three weeks. After having passed several towns I was quite happy each time to see the first road signs with the name Zeist in the late afternoon. On several occasions I lost time with repairing a punctured tire. During my trips, mainly on the special bicycle paths as were and are common in Holland, I saw on the adjoining main road the movements of German military vehicles. Once, being very busy with a punctured tube on a small hill surrounded by woods, a German military car stopped near me. I had to be calm and to go on

imperturbably with my work. One of the soldiers, a young fellow of around my age, looked amused at my attempts to insert the inner tube into its proper place. Within seconds he succeeded to push the tube in. Only when cycling down the hill, relieved, I realized that I had thanked the soldier in perfect German with a Viennese accent.

After arrival at Zeist, I first enjoyed lying in the warm water of a bath tub for nearly half an hour. We had only a few hours for our rapidly growing love affair, and therefore we enjoyed every minute of it by tasting mother Prüfer's excellent meals and by walking in the woods. However, most of the time we did not, as normal lovers would, talk about our future, but about our fears with regard to the constantly worsening situation. Fritzi's parents came originally from Galicia in Poland, and they sporadically received postcards from family members still living there. In the spring of 1942 a postcard arrived from a family member living in a small town in Poland. On this card a message was written, half in Jiddisch, half in Hebrew, telling a horrible story. In the villages around this family member, the Germans had started to load whole Jewish families into trucks. During the trip exhaust gases were piped into the cargo space. When the transport arrived at mass graves outside the villages, most of the men, women and children were dead. Dr. Prüfer, later on to be my father-in-law, was a Talmudic scribe who was able to read the complex wording without difficulty. Nevertheless, it was a miracle that the card had passed the severe censorship. I still remember the shattering impression this message made on us. We could not tell anybody about it because spreading rumours meant, certainly for Jews, the death penalty. We already knew how merciless the Nazi's from Austria could be, but now we learned even more about what they were able to do. After this message we knew for sure that deportation to Poland, which had meanwhile started for the Jews in Holland, meant a certain death. With great anxiety I returned home to Oele that weekend. During my trip I had time enough to think about my firm intention to do everything possible to remain out of the murderers' hands.

In late spring of 1942 Leo Reichenberger, who from time to time had been visiting me, came again to the farm. We had regular contacts, and he discussed with me during his visits his growing anxiety about our future. He was well informed, probably due to the fact that a brother of Ru

Cohen, David, had meanwhile become one of the leaders of the Jewish Council, which had to carry out the German measures against the Jews. This time Leo did not immediately discuss our problems, but asked me to take a short walk with him. His message was quickly told. I had been 8 months with the Wijnbergens, and there was not much more to learn for me on their farm. Moreover, they had needed a farmhand especially for the busy months before and after their move. At present, the family could take care of the daily work without help. A farmer at the outskirts of the town of Hengelo, who had employed Deventer pioneers for already many years, was urgently looking for a farmhand in view of the forthcoming childbirth of his wife. Leo had already promised the farmer to have a pioneer at his earliest convenience. For me everything came suddenly and unexpectedly. Even more surprising was the fact that the family Nijenhuis² was expecting me the following day. Granny was on a shopping tour that morning, and Leo had been with Gerrit for some time in the visitor's room before meeting me. Grandpa did some work out in the fields. Probably Gerrit had supported my quick leave, certainly since Granny, who always spoke with Leo during his visits, was not at home. Granny cried bitterly when she heard the news after her return. All day long she did not want to speak to anybody. My promise to visit her regularly, being so near, did not help much. I was surprised by the quick events; she was defeated. In order to overcome her grief, she started immediately to clean my clothes, to sew on buttons where necessary and to mend my socks. Later on, with tears still streaming down her cheeks, she packed my suitcase and put a number of presents on top of it, handkerchiefs, socks and a new shirt. Grandpa gave me his bicycle which by now had become my own anyway.

And so I left on a beautiful warm summer morning, with my suitcase behind me on the bicycle, after numerous embraces from Granny, and with the good wishes of the whole family. The "whole family", however, is not quite correct. For Grandpa this was too much, and he had taken refuge in the barn.

² The family name at my new home.

Chapter 7

Under the Roof of the Sparrows

The reception at the Nijenhuis farm was different, but as friendly and pleasant as eight months earlier with the Wijnbergens. Here I was eagerly expected, and from the first minute on I had the impression of being necessary to assist with the daily work on the farm. Rina, the farmer's wife, expected to give birth to her third child in a short time, although considering her bulky belly one would expect this to happen any moment. This obstacle notwithstanding, she sat down twice a day on a low milking stool to milk the cows. Willem, her husband, was a little skinny man, who enjoyed all sides of life as long as it did not include working. The family name Nijenhuis was nearly never used; everyone spoke about the Muskes'¹ probably as a reference to a stone tablet in front of the farm house which showed a black sparrow .

Willem's father, Grandpa Muske, was demented and shuffled all day around the farm or in the farm yard. Rina was not only the woman farmer but also head of the family, works manager, the mother of a number of small children, counselor for the neighbors, but above all a very diligent and wise woman. I soon realized that I had exchanged the matriarchy of Grandma Wijnbergen, at my previous home, for the matriarchy of Rina, which was even more dominating. "Willem has a weak constitution, Rina used to say, which resulted in Rina helping to milk the cows on the morning of delivery of her baby and then the day after while her husband had his napping. In addition to her daily work on the farm Rina had to care for the children, to breast-feed the baby, and to look constantly after the "great child, as she called Grandpa, who all the time misbehaved. One of his

¹

Sparrows, literally.

most harmless activities was to sneak into the chicken-house and break freshly laid eggs and suck them raw. "Ya is getting strong from eggs," he used to say when caught during these activities. But since he did this as long as he could find an egg, one had, if the family wanted to have at least some fresh eggs for them, to prevent his frequent walking over to the chicken house.

Friendly Willem, who would not hurt a fly, regularly had to attend to some business in town. Often Rina asked Willem to fetch something for her in town, not because she needed it but because she knew that she could not provide greater pleasure for her Willem, whom she loved dearly. At noon, when the train from Zutphen to Hengelo passed at the rear of the farm, one could be sure to see Willem arriving on his bicycle some time later. With a smile on her face, Rina used to say: "Here is Willem, hence the potatoes are ready. During the five months I stayed with the Muskes, I never heard Rina utter an unfriendly word to Willem or a disapproving remark about him to a third person. So was Willem, and so she liked him to be.

Once a month there was a community social evening at one of the farms in the neighborhood. Since Rina wanted to show off the new farmhand, I was invited to join the Muskes. All evening there was small talk mainly by the men as had been the case at Wiene. Since Willem was too shy and too modest to speak in public, Rina listened to the conversation intensively. The moment there was a silence Rina spread her feet, put her hands on her knees, and began with a long story, always starting with: "Our Willem has said She explained what Willem would want to say and what his ideas were, while he listened to her with a sheepish smile on his face, all the time admiring his wife. Nobody doubted even for a second that this was Rina's opinion, and she was wise enough to know this, too, but nevertheless during the long evening she started over and over again: "Our Willem has said Notwithstanding the total difference of character between husband and wife, I never have seen again such a happy and harmonious couple.

Because of this situation Rina needed, certainly during a period of limited activity, a right hand, a farmhand. With him, she discussed the daily activities on the farm and the work that had to be done. Also here she emphasized that she had discussed this at great length with

Willem in their bedroom and that the orders were actually not hers but his. If one played along with her, she was the most pleasant boss a farmhand could dream of. Angry she only became, and she could become quite angry, if one made even the faintest negative remark about Willem. Realizing all this, I could go along with Rina in the most pleasant way, I could carry out my work on my own and could even take initiatives. Rina, the daughter of a big farmer not far from Hengelo, knew all aspects of farm management, and could carry out all farm work without any problem. A complication for her was the fact that the town needed more space for house building, and that the Muskes were forced to sell some of their lands. As a consequence, they had to buy some land at Deaden, approximately eight kilometers from their farm. Because of this, we had frequently to go with horse-drawn vehicles to the new land, to bring solid and liquid manure to the fields, to plough and to sow and in winter time to collect mangers², together time consuming activities. With Willem alone on the carriage I passed by the beautiful hotel Carlshaven many times. Behind the broad windows perfectly dressed people drank a cup of coffee or sat at a nice dinner table, and passing by the hotel I frequently dreamed of sitting in the nice dinner room myself³.

After her delivery Rina was, as she called herself, fully an elder lady, working continuously from 6:00 AM till late in the evening. Feeding the baby, caring for the other children, doing the laundry, preparing the meals and constantly looking after Grandpa were, as she used to say, "the small tasks." The real work was the farm work, milking the cows, caring for the animals and, if necessary, working in the fields. When a post of a fence was broken one could see Rina with a big wooden hammer putting a new one in

² Large beets used for cattle feed.

³ Dreaming about this, it was the last thing I could expect that 52 years later I would be the guest of honour at this hotel on the occasion of my retirement as President of the Royal Dutch Veterinary Association.

the ground. For her nothing was impossible and she never complained about too much work.

During the evening people from the nearby town came to the farm to buy milk. I helped Rina filling the cans or pails and heard even more than at Oele what was going on and which new measures were announced by the Germans. It was during my first weeks with the Muskes that I learned from the newspaper about the duty for Jews to wear a yellow Star of David on their clothes. This announcement made a crushing impression on me. I realized that the screw was now turned on with a higher speed, and it was absolutely clear to me what the end of this screwing would be. I cut the news about the Star from the newspaper and have it still in my file "War." Jews had to buy the Star for 4 cents each, but I do not remember if the Stars could be purchased in Hengelo or had to be ordered in Amsterdam. For me this was not a priority to know since I was fully determined never as a free person to wear the Star. On the farm this was not such a problem, but even this was soon going to be changed. A neighbor of the Muskes, who peddled milk on a horse drawn carrier tricycle in town became suddenly sick some three months after my arrival at the farm. He was without children, and with only an old grandma in the house. Rina knew immediately how to solve that problem. "Our new farmhand, Doan, will help the family till Gradus (the neighbour farmer) is on his feet again." So it happened that during the first summer months of 1942 I became a milk roundsman in Hengelo. After milking in the morning and after a quick breakfast I left the neighbour's farm with horse and carrier tricycle together with a number of full milk cans in order to deliver the milk at the customers' houses. I wore wooden shoes, Manchester trousers and a grey linen blouse, without the Star on it! This was quite dangerous since most of my customers knew, also owing to my accent, that I was not native born in Holland. Soon there must have been a general knowledge that I was a Jewish boy. Especially the vergers of the church and his wife, who gave me a cup of coffee and a piece of cake each morning, warned me over and over again that one of the NSB members⁴ might warn the

⁴ The NSB (National Socialist Movement) was the political party in Holland which collaborated with the Germans during the war. Many of their members acted as henchmen for the German occupation forces.

police. Fortunately, Gradus recovered after some time which made an end to my career as milk roundsman, but at the same time to my quite reckless behaviour in not following up, as a Jew, the German rules.

In the evening, when Rina was still busy, Willem listened to the radio or read the newspaper, while Grandpa snored in his easy chair with his mouth open so that brown tobacco stained spittle run off onto his blouse. Willem had much interest in the war events and in the German occupation, but it was difficult for him to find the right words to express his ideas. He considered all that happened in the outside world as terrible and was constantly worrying about the future. At the beginning of my stay with the Muskes I visited the Wijnbergens on the bicycle from time to time in order to inform Granny about the well being of her "laddie," and to discuss with Grandpa the situation. However, after the introduction of the Star these trips became too dangerous since inspections were frequent during the evening hours. Moreover, I felt at home with the Muskes, and Rina appreciated it very much when I gave her a helping hand in the evening. It was an exceptionally beautiful summer, everything went well on the farm, and I had found a very pretty and peaceful home.

Until the morning early in August that is, when the postman delivered a letter for me. The message was short and clear: I had to present myself, with working shoes and a rucksack, at the main railway station in Amsterdam and to report to a German post within a few days at 1:30 in the night. Within a few hours I had packed in a linen sack a few of my possessions and told Rina that unfortunately this would be the end of my stay with them. Before leaving on my bicycle to Zeist I had just the opportunity, shortly before 12:00 noon, to say goodbye to Willem. While he did not understand my consternation, Rina fully did. For the first time during all the months I saw her in panic, not because of the loss of her farmhand, but honestly caring for my personal future. She fully understood why I was in such a hurry and with tears in her eyes she put 10 guilders in my linen sack. A few hours after receipt of the letter I crossed the bridge over the Ijssel river at Deventer, approaching a very, very uncertain future.

Chapter 8

Sleeping Above the Pigs

My totally unexpected arrival at Zeist caused great panic with the Prüfer family. Before leaving the Muskes' I had burned the letter containing the order to present myself in Amsterdam, so that I could not show it to them, but the fact that I was called in with regularity caused a great amount of fear. It was quite evident that, now being on a list, I should not stay more than one or two days with the Prüfers' if I did not want to bring all of us in danger. After a nearly sleepless night, I took my bicycle, which was now my most precious possession, in order to see if I could find a farm around Zeist where a farmhand was needed. The difficulty was that I would have to tell about my illegal status¹ which certainly would discourage any future employer because of the severe penalties administered in such cases when discovered. I cycled around Zeist through a number of small villages with a great number of farms. From time to time I approached a farmer who was at work in his orchard or pastures. There was interest in a helping hand, especially a cheap one, but the moment a farmer heard about my illegal status, they treated me as if I was a leper. They even did not want to talk with me any longer, as it was highly dangerous. It was a beautiful summer day, ripe fruits on the trees, green pastures, and a luminous sky. But I cycled through a dark night, without support of the Deventer Association, without a home, nearly without money, and above all, without a future.

Later in the afternoon I decided to return to Zeist, although I realized that I could not stay at the Prüfers' home any longer than one or two nights. The coming night would be the night I was to present myself in

¹ I had become a fugitive from one day to the next.

Amsterdam, and after not showing up, I would undoubtedly be put on a list of wanted persons. The police in Hengelo would probably be asked by a German bureau to enquire with the Muskes' about me, and with Willem it would take them only a few seconds to find out that I had left for my girlfriend at Zeist. Since there was a limited number of Jewish families living at Zeist, it would not be too difficult to locate me. I had but a few days to find a badly needed hiding place. In a pasture (very near to the area where today the university hospital of Utrecht is located), a young farmer was milking his cows. There was a herd of about 20 cows, and there were quite a number of milk cans on a carriage, of which most seemed to be empty. I parked my bicycle against the fence, and walked slowly into the pasture. "Can I help you with milking?", I asked the young farmer as calmly as possible. The man, bending over his pail, had not heard me arriving and looked surprised at his unexpected visitor. "That's not easy, he said, "milking is something one has to learn.

I proposed to demonstrate my experience. "Take a pail and a milking stool from the carriage, said the farmer, and he continued with milking. I took the utensils and sat down under a cow with a full udder. I milked as if my life was depending on it. Most of the time this is a matter of speech, but now it was the bare and bitter truth. Together with the farmer I came up to the milk cans on the carriage with a pail full of foaming milk. The farmer looked at me but did not say a single word which I considered a stimulation to continue with milking. Within an hour we had milked all cows, and I had done half of the work. "You really can milk, said the farmer, "and this is an advantage today, because my wife had to see a doctor this afternoon. Normally the two of us do the milking. "Wouldn't you want help?", I asked carefully, realizing that this might be the last chance for the day, and perhaps for the days to come. The farmer leaned with his full weight against the warm milk cans and looked at me puzzled for quite a long time. I had the feeling that he guessed my situation, and wanted to ask a number of questions. But instead of this, he continued as if thinking aloud: "Yes, my wife is in the last few months of her pregnancy. It will not be easy with the work in the coming months. I told him that I had a few years of experience as a farmhand but did at the same time not conceal my present status. He was clearly frightened by my story, but did not finish our conversation. "Yah, yah, he

said reluctantly, "I will have to discuss this with my wife and my parents. Come again tomorrow.

I returned to the Prüfers', and told them about my experiences. Very tired I went to bed quite early. I slept immediately, but after a few hours I was fully awake. "What is going to happen tomorrow? What will be the decision of the farmer's family council?" These questions were going around in my mind all night long. Every half hour I looked at my watch, but at around 4:00 I could not remain in my bed any longer. I put on my clothes, my farmhand outfit - the Manchester trousers, the grey blouse and my cap. In the peep of the day² I took the small path I had discovered the other day, running from Zeist to De Bilt. The cows stood already near the fence, but there was nobody at the pasture yet. After waiting for nearly an hour, I heard the sound of empty milk cans shaking on the carriage. The young farmer pulled the carriage, and at his side was a young sturdy woman. When he saw me, a short grin went over his face. "You can go home, Joke," he said to his wife, "Doan here will help me with milking." A great weight was taken off my mind, he was not going to send me away. During milking hardly any word was spoken, and when the milk cans were all full, I pulled the carriage home, as if I had done this for years. I had to give full attention to where Jitze (I had meanwhile learned that Jitze was his first name) headed, since I still did not know the location of the farm. "Here we are," said Jitze, and took a left turn into a small path which led to a large farm house with on its gable the name Bureveld 2 ³. In the spacious kitchen Joke was busy preparing the breakfast while in the empty stable an old man repaired a machine. An old woman came from what had to be the living room into the kitchen and offered me a hand: "I am Jitze's mother." Also his father, Flip Kraaikamp, came now into the kitchen to introduce himself and to shake hands. We sat down around the table while Joke poured coffee from a large can. There were already a number of prepared sandwiches on the table. During

² At sunrise.

³ Neighbor's Field number 2 .

the meal not much was said. After the meal the old man shuffled back to his repair job, and the old woman returned to the living room. I remained with Jitze and Joke, waiting for what was going to come. "You can work here," said Jitze, "but you cannot stay with us. It is just too risky." My disappointment was so great that one could easily see it on my face. "Where will I have to stay," I stammered, defeated and helpless. There was need for further family council, and after some time Jitze informed me that I could work all day long, but that it was absolutely impossible for the family to have me under their roof during the night. When I explained that I had no possibility whatsoever to find a place for the night, there was a long silence. Especially, the young couple seemed to have a rough time. They were happy to have found a farmhand so easily, and they certainly wanted to help me but they were just afraid.

After sitting a long time around the table and brooding on the problem, Jitze stood up and said: "Come a moment with me." We walked across the yard in the direction of a large barn on the edge of a fruit orchard. In the barn were about 20 sows, some with a number of piglets. Above the pigs there was an attic for the storage of straw and hay. "If there is no other way and if you don't mind, you could sleep on the attic above the pigs," said Jitze bashfully. Did I mind indeed! It was a relief, and I asked immediately if I could sleep here already the coming night. Jitze realized my urgency and was thinking about what to answer. Finally he said: "O.K., but let us make a clear agreement: If they ever find you in the barn, we do not know you, and have never seen you before. Is this understood? But before deciding this possibility, I have again to discuss it with my wife and my parents. So, wait a moment."

Again I waited under great tension for the result of the family council. Miracles of miracles, I had found a farmer who at least wanted to help me, and I had, even if it was only temporarily, to stay here because there was just no other possibility. I helped old Flip repairing his machine, I brought liquid manure with a horse drawn carriage to the pastures, and I repaired a broken fence. Only after milking time Jitze said: "Let's see how it goes, you sleep above the pigs for the time being." He seemed not to be too happy with this solution, but on the other hand he had certainly use for a farmhand in the coming months. This consideration must have played a major role during the family council.

Hours later I lay in the hay above the grunting pigs, and looked through a hole in the roof at the rapidly passing clouds, and at the brightly shining stars later on. I had a kind of home for the time being but the situation remained dangerous. Within a few days the neighbours of the Kraaikamps and the customers who came to buy milk in the evening, would know about my presence. Contrary to my stay in the East, I lived now in the middle of the country in a quite densely populated area. There were not only farms around the Kraaikamp place but also a number of normal houses at the edge of the village De Bilt. Soon I heard that in this village there were a number of Dutch National Socialists, and that even a few policemen belonged to this organization. Altogether, it was quite a disturbing situation.

Already in the beginning of the German occupation, Jews received a "J" (Jew) on their identity card which meant that at any routine inspection I would immediately be recognized not only as a Jew but soon also as a fugitive. Living now illegally, it became crucial to secure possession of another, mostly forged, identity card. Via my contact person with the resistance forces, which had become stronger due to the ever increasing pressure on the population and the Jews especially, I applied for such a document. There was a constant need for ration cards for those who could not obtain those cards legally, and for forged identity cards. When my contact man heard about my problem, I received within days a new forged identity card. My name was now Johannes Karel Kok, born on March 17, 1917, in Djambi, Netherlands East Indies. Most of the time an easily remembered date of birth was chosen and a place of birth from where no data could be obtained in war time. I was asked to forget my real name as soon as possible, and certainly never to tell who had provided the new identity card and who was my contact man. I was not safe, but I had a somewhat safer feeling with this new card. I certainly should have destroyed my old identity card, but due to my mania to keep things, I did not do so⁴.

For more than three months, from the beginning of August till mid-November 1942 I stayed on the Kraaikamp

4 Both of these cards are still in my possession.

farm. That this came to a good end without problems is one of the links in the chain of wonders which let me survive 5 years of German occupation in Holland. The Kraaikamps were nice people, the work was not too hard and even pleasant, but there was all the time a tension among us. Without speaking about it, we were fully aware of the danger which threatened us permanently. Deportations, razzia's⁵ and executions in the fortress not far away from the farm, were near daily events. What one could not read in the newspapers, was brought daily in the never ending stream of horror news and rumours by the customers who came to buy milk or other farm products.

The war became more and more violent, the bombings of German towns increased and the German armies met more and more resistance both in Africa and in the Soviet Union. There seemed to come an end to the years of German victories. However, the "war" against the population in the occupied countries and especially against the members of the resistance movements and the Jews was only at its beginning and was intensifying. Hearing all the news and the rumours I was constantly on my guard, even at night when I listened, half asleep, to every unusual sound. I never could show any nervousness in order not to frighten the family more than they already were frightened. Jitze and his father were most of the time at work around the farm, but the women had much time to speak with the neighbors or with visitors, and they told us the news and especially the rumours, during our meals.

The old lady was of Frisian⁶ origin, and had married Flip who at that time was a widower. Jitze was their only son. She had grown up on a Frisian "gentleman's farm," where women did not do farm work. Therefore, she considered Bureveld 2 also as a gentleman's farm where only the men had to carry out daily work. She sat all day long nicely dressed in the best room of the farm, busy with needle work or

⁵ Round-up of people from their homes or wherever they happened to be.

⁶ One of the northern provinces of Holland especially known for cattle breeding.

reading a book. Joke came from a farm near the Town Hall at Bilthoven, only a few kilometers away, and she was used to help with all kinds of farm work. At that time, she was hampered by her pregnancy to carry out much work. Although with regard to my stay she was the most nervous one of the family, she accepted the situation especially because in a short time I had taken over most of her tasks. On German orders many grasslands had to be ploughed in order to produce more grains. Also her family, the Doornebals, had done this, and they now had fields where rye was grown. When the crop was ripe, the rye had to be harvested by hand, and I was lent out to the Doornebals' home farm to help out. For weeks in the extremely hot summer of 1942 we worked with a curved sickle and a hook cutting down the rye in the burning sun, interrupted from time to time only by a mug of cold buttermilk from a large blue can.

At the end of October and beginning of November, my night quarter above the pigs became increasingly unpleasant. It was quite cold, and when it rained, raindrops fell on my blanket and on my face because of the broken roof. However there was no other solution, and I was happy to have at least a place for hiding. In the middle of November, cutting trees in the orchard, Jitze suddenly said: "Doan, it is not longer possible. Joke can give birth to our child at any moment now, and she is afraid. Each day is more so. I am sorry, you will have to look for another place and, don't wait too long." The message did not come unexpectedly, but did nevertheless hit me hard. There was only one point of light: I had made contact with the resistance movement and had been told that they would help me when necessary. The moment had come now. With regret I said goodbye to the Kraaikamps, who had been so helpful during the last few months. I told Joke that I fully understood her fear, which I could imagine. "If you need help", said Jitze, "you know where to find us." He said it, but he did not believe himself.

In the beginning of the nineteen-fifties the Doornebal family sold most of their land to the Dutch government which wanted to build there a new State Institute for Public Health. That means that I, who has been with that Institute for 32 years, could be considered as its first employee. One of the conditions of the old Doornebal for the sale

was that his two sons should get employment in the New Institute. When in the beginning of the nineteen sixties I had to pay a working visit to the new animal quarters at Bilthoven (our laboratory was then still in the old Institute in Utrecht), I met one of the brothers Doornebal with whom I had cut the rye during many weeks. He had not seen me for nearly 20 years but recognized me immediately. Hi , he said, 'here we have our Doan', not realizing that I had meanwhile had become Director of the Division of Microbiology to which his Unit, Animal Experiments, belonged. I talked with him about his work, the war period and over Joke, his sister, and Jitze, who both had emigrated to Canada not long after the war. "And what are you doing these days?," he asked me finally. When I told him that I worked in the same Institute as he, he first did not understand till his comrades informed him that I was Dr. Kampelmacher, Director of the Sector to which he belonged. During the war I had never mentioned my real name, and he could not know that "our Doan" and his boss Dr. Kampelmacher, whose name he had since heard frequently, were one and the same person. The same evening his father, the old Doornebal, ringed at our door at home. Politely he took his black cap from his head and told me that he came to offer his sincere apologies for the behaviour of his son who had called me Doan in the morning. I asked him to come in, offered him a glass of brandy, and emphasized that he should not worry about the incident. We talked some time about the war period, and finally he left, reassured.

Chapter 9

Through the eye of the needle

The contact man of the resistance movement was not surprised to see me and understood, without many words, that I was in immediate need of a hiding place. The same evening already I sat at the dinner table with the Vermeulen family at Zeist. I was told that this was a temporary address till a more permanent place could be found. Mr. Vermilion was a gymnastic instructor at the nearby high school and I received a friendly welcome by the whole family which included his wife, two sons and a daughter. To sleep in a nice clean bed in a private room was already an experience after the months above the pigs. This feeling of well being was even underlined by a bathtub with hot water. All members of the family were active in the resistance movement, carrying out all kind of duties especially with regard to the care for people who needed a hiding place. Already after a few days, one of the Vermeulen sons brought me to my permanent hiding address. This turned out to be the home of Mrs. Charlotte van Dijk, a sister of Mr. Vermeulen, living in Utrecht, 73 Havikstraat¹.

Up to this point in my story I did not consider it difficult to draw on my memory about what happened more than 50 years ago. But I feel it as a very difficult if not impossible task to describe the last stage of two and a half years in occupied Holland, and to narrate how daily life really was in this period, and what really happened at my hiding address. How to describe the nearly thousand days, and not to forget nights, full of danger, tension, insecurity and fear! However, fear does scarcely fit in this enumeration. If I would have lived with fear during these years, I doubt if I would have survived. At this moment of writing down my memoirs I feel, in a way, more fear than at those actual times, having only afterwards learned what really had happened. Presser, for instance, describes in his impressive work "Ondergang"² that every citizen could receive 40 guilders (approximately 12 US Dollars) by letting the Germans know where a Jew was hiding. I never knew about this during the war. But, within a few days after my arrival the people living in and around the Havikstraat, a densely populated area, had known about my staying with the Van Dijk family.

¹ Hawkstreet

² 2 J. Presser, 'Ondergang' ('Destruction'), ISBN no. 90 1200 4756.

Moreover, I am very hesitant to utter a word of complaint in my story because I am aware now of what happened with the Jews in concentration and destruction camps. My story is not the story of a Jew who has lived in hiding for a long time. Really hidden as so many Jews had to do in Holland, lasted only for a relatively short time for me. Waiting day by day for what? For the catastrophe of being found by the Germans? Or to wait inactively weeks, months and probably years for the end of a nightmare which could go on for years? I was at that time 23 and 24 years of age, full of energy and spirit of enterprise. I had to do something, although I myself and my saviours realized only too well how dangerous any activity outside the house would be. These were, as the saying goes, the best years of one's life, and I could not spend these years inactive and isolated. Moreover, as already said, all those living around the Van Dijk's home soon knew about my presence. There were continuously visitors, friends of the children, family members, and it was impossible to keep my presence secret from all of them. Hence, quite a number of people knew that a Jewish boy was hiding at the Van Dijk's place from the first days on.

But let me start, my hesitation notwithstanding, about the last stages of my story.

Charlotte van Dijk, or Aunt Lot" as nearly everyone called her, had as a young girl, daughter of a cabinet maker, fallen in love with a Javanese young man, who studied in Utrecht. She married Van Dijk, and left with him for the former Dutch East Indies (now Indonesia). In a relatively short time the young couple was blessed with five children, two girls and three boys. Not long before the beginning of the Second World War, Aunt Lot left the Indies with four of her children in order to provide for them an education in Holland. The oldest son, Wim, remained in the Indies in view of the fact that he was soon to be called to military service. After the outbreak of the war the financial situation became for Aunt Lot very difficult because there was no longer the possibility of money transfer from the Indies to Holland. The two daughters, Vera and Els, were able to find jobs and to earn money for the daily life, while the two boys, Ysbrand and Rob, who was the youngest, still attended school. The family had rented a house in the Vogelenbuurt³ in Utrecht, Aunt Lot's home town, and would have managed quite well if not, to make matters worse, Vera had died from a serious form of meningitis soon after the outbreak of the war. The movement to Holland, the poor living circumstances, but above all the loss of her oldest daughter and breadwinner, were serious blows for Aunt Lot. However, she remained high spirited and did not show her grief. The resistance movement paid for my stay with the family and Aunt Lot agreed to receive a boarder realizing only too well the risk she took for herself and her family. That she earned some money in this way was nice, but was not her main motive. She was convinced as was her brother and his family that

³ Birds-district

people in need of help must and should receive it. "There are persons who now help Wim", she used to say, referring to her oldest son who meanwhile had joined the allied forces. During the war Aunt Lot's courage and will power became more impressive all the time⁴.

I arrived at Aunt Lot's place on November 18th, 1942. Besides my farmhand's outfit, my most precious possession was an old bicycle for which I had no need at present. Aunt Lot had decided to put me in the front room, as if I was a normal boarder. The room was modestly furnished, a table with a chair, a bed and a closet, that was all. On a small table before a bricked-up fireplace, stood a stuffed snake, with glass eyes, staring at me terrifyingly, especially at night when the lights of the street lights were shining into my room. I did not sleep much during the first night, summarizing in my mind the last four years and trying to look into my future. Had I to wait for the end of the war, in this room together with the stuffed snake? Had I, after my years of extremely hard work on the farms, to sit inactively the whole day? I could read books, I could take up a study, I could listen to the radio, but could I do this for years on end? I had the feeling, just as earlier with Grandpa Wijnbergen, that this was only the beginning, and that the end of the nightmare was still far away.

The first morning Els knocked on my door, and came in with the breakfast. As I remember, this was the only and last time. Soon I was part of the family, had a bed in the boys' room, and took my meals with Aunt Lot and the children at the big table. The sliding doors between the front room and the living room were opened, and I became very soon an equivalent member of the family. Within a few days Aunt Lot had not a boarder but three boys in her home. The change from years on a farm to the upper part of the house in a big town was quite radical, but the acceptance and hospitality which I received from all members of the family was very helpful. I was of the same age as Els, and a bit older than Ysbrand which favoured our daily understanding. Later we had, as happens in each community, explosive quarrels from time to time.

Soon I realized that the family was in dire financial circumstances and that the small household income had to be used as economically as possible. This in a family with young children who needed much as far as food, clothes and school utensils were concerned. Due to the war Aunt Lot did not receive financial help from her husband in the East Indies

⁴ In committing these experiences to paper, I feel compelled to express my sincere gratitude and admiration for this courageous woman.

any longer, which resulted in Els now being the only breadwinner of the family. How much the resistance paid for my lodgings I never got to know, but I guess that it was a modest amount of money. Els worked as an administrative help at the Dutch Foundation for Psychotechnique, not far from our home. I was quite curious to know what exactly happened at this Institute and frequently talked with Els about her work and the work of others in and around her office. In the Institute candidates were tested for their suitability for a certain position, a profession to be taken up or for an education they had in mind for themselves or their children.

Employers frequently asked for a psychotechnical report on a candidate for a job. Candidates had to perform different tests in writing, had to answer specific questions and had to give their interpretation for various drawings or pictures. At the beginning and at the end of these tests, which took a whole day, the candidates had an interview with the responsible test-leader, in most cases persons with a university background, who later prepared the final report. The Institute had already been active for many years, but shortly before the outbreak of World War II the interest in psychotechnical research was increasing. The Institute was managed by two directors, Dr. Kuiper and Jonkheer van Lennep (van Lennep Esq), who both tried to emphasize the value of psycho-technical tests. The more Els told me about the Institute and its daily work, the more I became interested in the test-methodology. One day at the beginning of 1943 Els told us during dinner that a young man who worked at the mail department had been arrested that day, probably because of black market activities. "Could not I take over his work?," I asked Els, to the surprise of the whole family. Els did not regard my question as serious, but after I insisted she promised to make enquiries about the possibilities the next day. In this way my life as a "submarine" came to an end after a few weeks, and I became a co-worker at the Institute. In the first week I indeed worked in the mail department, putting reports into envelopes, fixing stamps on letters and sorting out incoming mail. After a few days I was asked to report at Dr. Kuiper's office. Dr. Kuiper was a tall, lean man about whom all kinds of anecdotes circulated in the Institute. "Kok is your name?," he asked. "Yes, Sir", I answered, "Johannes Karel Kok." "Now, come on, Kok," Dr. Kuiper said, looking at me with a barely hidden smile, "tell me confidentially who you really are." Briefly, I told him about my origin, my education and my escape from Austria to Holland. What I told him did not surprise Dr Kuiper at all. Because of my accent he had already guessed most of the

story. Moreover, the Institute was a hiding place for many well-known Dutch persons such as writers, actors and politicians who needed to be out of sight of the Germans as much as possible. "What is your work with us?," asked Dr. Kuiper. "Most of the time fixing stamps on letters, Sir," I answered. "I did not know that you need at present a High School education for such activities," he said somewhat amused. "No, Sir, I don't believe so," was my unprejudiced answer. Already a few days later I was put, much to Els' surprise, on a training course for the evaluation of test work of candidates.

I worked nearly all of 1943 at the Institute and earned a salary many times more than my wages as a farmhand. Moreover, I was extremely happy to be in a position now to express my gratitude for Aunt Lot's hospitality by bringing home some money. I did my work with interest and pleasure, and from time to time I realized and appreciated the enormous difference between working for Zweers a few years ago and now for Dr. Kuiper. In the morning and in the evening I walked from the Havikstraat to the Wolvenplein⁵ along the entrance gate of the municipal prison, which was on the other side of the street from the Institute. Frequently, while I was passing by, the gate was opened for a small bus with prisoners who were just brought in or who went for interrogation to the German Gestapo Headquarters. Entering the Institute building I felt relatively safe and was immediately carried away by my daily commitments. The workers, busy to evaluate the test results, sat on long tables in the library where most of the time a pleasant atmosphere was predominant. There was not a uninterrupted work flow, and this resulted in plenty of time for discussions, listening illegally to the radio⁶ and especially for exchanging views with colleagues about the news. There were, as already mentioned, a number of well known persons, politicians, artists and members of the resistance who needed to be out of the limelight, for the time being or permanently.

Looking back on the year 1943 I have a strong feeling of unreality. I was a "submarine" and at the same time I was not. I had a job with fixed working hours, and I earned a salary, but I was an illegal person with another identity,

⁵ Wolves' Square.

⁶Soon after the German occupation an order was issued, which forbade listening to radio stations from outside the German Reich and the occupied countries.

false, and at the same time remaining the person I really was. It would not be true to say that my host family and I myself lived in permanent fear, but all the time there was a tension and a feeling of danger, especially with Els who observed my daily performance between my legal and illegal existence with mixed feelings. Probably we suppressed our real feelings, otherwise we would not have had a relatively normal life. I say "our," because I was not Aunt Lot's only "guest" for a long time. In the middle of 1943 arrived an old lady, far into the seventies, whom we from the first moment on called Grandma Catania because on the day of her arrival the Allied Forces took the town of Catania on the island of Sicily. Later on came a young Jewish boy and in 1944 my girl friend, Fritzi Prüfer, who had lived hidden at Zeist for quite some time but who had to find another address.

On a certain evening, Aunt Lot did not come home. She had left in the afternoon, but we did not know whereto. What to do? Go running? Where to go? It was already after 9:00 PM, at which time nobody was allowed to be outside. We only had one option: to sit and wait. Ysbrand and I sat all night at the open window in order to listen for approaching cars. In the loft we had made a hatch in which we could, with great effort, squeeze above the ceiling. What the others were going to do, we did not know, and I wonder if we would have gone under the ceiling and would have left them alone. It was a horrible night, full of extreme tension, nobody slept even for a few minutes, and hardly a word was spoken. The following morning Aunt Lot came home, pale and tired. Only after some time, still very upset, she was able to tell her story. She had to be at a certain address to receive ration cards for us which the resistance movement collected illegally. When she rang the door bell, she was immediately arrested by two men in civilian clothes. Later on it became clear that the man living at this address had been arrested the day before, and that the house now functioned as a kind of trap for possible other members of the resistance. Aunt Lot was brought to a police station and was interrogated for hours in order to find out for which purpose she had visited the house. She had been able to explain her way out of it and was placed into a prison cell. This morning, wonder above wonders, they let her go, without bringing her home, and to have a look at her family. It took us several weeks to regain our stability after this unpleasant incident.

Already before the war the Van Dijk's had hired an allotment, i.e. a small piece of land to grow vegetables and potatoes, not far from their home at the outskirts of Utrecht. In view of the ever growing shortages of food, the

two Van Dijk-boys and I were frequently busy with our small enterprise. Especially in spring and in the summer months we went to our garden in the early evening hours and worked there till curfew time. One evening when Ysbrand and I were just ready with our work and stood on the small path with ditches on both sides with the intention to go home, two uniformed men on bicycles approached. I recognized them immediately as a German gendarme and a member of the Dutch Quisling-militia, which were known as fanatics, as henchmen for the Germans. Although our first reaction was to run away, we stood as frozen. If they wanted to see our identity card, I had instinctively the feeling that I should be controlled by the German. "Fasten your shoelaces," I said to Ysbrand, and walked a few steps away from him. As I had hoped, the Dutchman remained with Ysbrand, while the German came up to me with his bicycle, asking for my identity card. To remain calm, not to panic, was now imperative for me. While the Dutchman started to ask Ysbrand all kind of questions, I handed the German my identity card which certainly could be recognized as falsified by an experienced observer. The Dutchman was suspicious as to Ysbrand's answers, and he said to his colleague: "Let's take them to the police station," half as a command, half as a question. "It's already late," answered the German, and in our direction: "Get lost!" Those were seconds that hinged between life or death for us! Ysbrand had to wait for me for several minutes, my knees being too weak to walk home after watching the rapidly vanishing pair of figures.

One would conclude that after this warning we would have slowed down our activities. However, Aunt Lot continued with her work for the resistance forces, and we went again routinely to our piece of land. What else could we do? Stop our activities, and sit in fear at home all day? Afterwards, it may seem unrealistic, we never discussed another possibility. The incidents clearly showed that we walked permanently near the abyss, but certainly we did not realize it most of the time. Only today, after more than 50 years, I wonder how we could have lived in so relatively good spirits, playing monopoly in the evening, having disguise parties and all kind of jokes during the annual Saint Nicholas celebrations⁷.

At the end of 1943 my career with the Institute for Psychotechnic came to an end. I do not know for sure what the real reason was. The number of requests for testing decreased

⁷ Looking back, I feel much more postponed fear than at the time itself. Did we not realize how dangerous our situation was? Or, was just going on the only way for surviving?

constantly, and the Institute became more and more known as a hiding place for all kind of persons which could not live legally any more. Also Else had to leave, and she became soon a nurse in a Utrecht hospital. So, from one day to the other, my second period living as a submarine started, although again it was not hiding in the real sense, as so many Jews had to do during the war. During my work at the Institute I had made contacts with the illegal students' movement, and had learned that it was possible to study with the limited possibilities available. My main interests was a medical career, and during my work at the Institute of Psychotechnic I had undergone a test session for myself. The report emphasized the ability for a University study, in the fields of human, veterinary or dental medicine. For these three studies a propaedeutic year was necessary, and I enquired immediately into the possibilities of following lessons. The idea to do in all these "lost years" something for my future life was very challenging. In this way I became a first year student of Dr. Chris van den Broek who gave lectures in zoology at his home address, rather far from the Havikstraat. We had twice a week between 5:00 to 7:00 PM lectures with the intention to sit for an examination in writing after some months. The questions would be handed out in a closed envelope by the professor of zoology to Dr. Van den Broek and would later be evaluated by the Professor at his home. The work of the University staff had nearly come to an end meanwhile since students were obliged by the German occupation authorities to sign a so-called declaration of loyalty, which by far the majority of students refused to do. I had difficulties with the lectures as well as with the forthcoming examinations although Dr. Van den Broek's lecturing was compelling. For six years I had not taken part in any learning process, and initially I had great problems in concentrating myself and taking up what Dr. Van den Broek told and described. Moreover, twice a week I had to walk approximately four kilometers to and from Dr. Van den Broek's home through busy streets on which persons were frequently controlled by Dutch police and German officials. Arriving at Dr. Van den Broek's home I had already a dangerous route behind me with the prospect of having to do it again within a couple of hours. As interesting as the description of the respiratory system of amphibia might be - and the description was certainly excellent-, I could barely concentrate, which resulted in the fact that I passed the examination with difficulty in the early autumn of 1944.

A few weeks after the end of the war I met Dr. Van den Broek in downtown Utrecht. I was still enjoying the euphoria of being free again, without having decided what to do at twenty five (which I considered at that time as the age of an old man). "Hello, Kok," said Dr van Den Broek happily, "how are you?" "I am fine," I answered, "but actually my real name is not Kok but Kampelmacher." I thought all the time that it was not indeed your real name," said Dr. van den Broek, "but I am so used to it that for me you remain Kok. May I give you some advice? Don't go on as a student. You seem to be a clever fellow, but certainly not a future academician." The next day I went to the University bureau and asked for the official papers for admittance as a student. Dr. van den Broek's remark gave me just the last push I needed for making a decision I had been playing around with since the liberation. Twenty six years later, in 1971, I told Dr van Den Broek about this episode in a letter of invitation for my inauguration as a professor at the Agricultural University at Wageningen. He congratulated me in a very kind way during the reception, and said: "My best wishes, Kok, - for me you will always be Kok -, it seems that you are capable for an academic position."

I had now passed, although with great effort, my preliminary examination, zoology, and there were possibilities to attend other lectures. However, the daily life was becoming harder each day, and I had to use all my energy for other activities. Already during my studies in zoology, the provision of electricity had come to an end with the unpleasant consequence that I had to study my handwritten notes in the quiet early morning hours with the help of a cotton wick floating in oil in a small glass. During the evening all of us sat in the dark living room, but when it became colder we went to bed because of the lack of fuel. In the morning I got up at 5:00 AM, put on all the clothes I had and an overcoat of Ysbrand, and tried to study with the help of the feeble light, till 8:00 AM.

This was bearable, but an even worse enemy than the cold was approaching; hunger. The resistance movement had all the time taken care of food coupons for Jews in hiding, realizing only too well that the host families, which already took great risks, should not be forced to share their very limited food rations with their "guests." On the whole line, but certainly in families with growing-up children, the situation became worse by the day in the autumn of 1944. Moreover, it became more and more difficult for the resistance movement to lay hands on food coupons. Fortunately, Els brought something home from the hospital, especially cigarettes which Aunt Lot was able to change for food.

One day Els told us, shortly after the unfortunate battle of Arnhem, that the BAB⁸ was looking for medical staff to escort people, from inundated areas or who were in danger of the artillery fire from the Allied Forces on the South side of the large rivers to the Northern part of The Netherlands. She had presented herself already via the hospital as a helper, especially for the purpose of being able to bring some food home from the Northern provinces. As had been the case with the Institute for Psychotechnic, I asked Els if I could not present myself at the BAB as a medical student. After some enquiries, this turned out indeed to be possible and I was asked to present myself within a few days at Schalkwijk, a small village not far from Utrecht from where the trains with the groups to be evacuated left. I presented myself as medical student J.K. Kok, and without further questions was accepted by a doctor who was in charge of the whole operation. We received a white band to wear around the arm, with the black letters "BAB" and a stamp with the eagle and the swastika, and wearing this I became entirely "kosher." I do not remember exactly for how long Els and I myself have worked for the BAB, but I estimate that we accompanied 12 to 13 convoys during the winter months of 1944-1945. The people who were assembled at Schalkwijk travelled in freight cars with wooden benches to the Northern towns Sneek, Leeuwarden and Groningen. The trip was most of the time not too easy. Sometimes we were under way for days because military trains had priority or because enemy aircraft (for us most welcome!) were in the air. During these days the people had to live from the food they had taken with them and which they shared with accompanying personnel.

After arrival of the trains at their destination the escorting personnel was allowed to stay for a few days with a friendly family, mostly members of the resistance forces or good friends of such members. They provided us not only with lodging and plenty of food but also gave us messages and food parcels to take home for their friends in the western part of Holland. Compared with what we had at home, we felt each time as having arrived at the land of Cockaigne. Realizing this abundance, we tried to eat as much as we could during our few days in the North. However, this "boarding" did not always come to a good end. On a very cold winter day we arrived in Sneek. Els and I, together with two other helpers, were brought to the home of a blacksmith. We had been en route for several days with a minimum of food, and we were really starving. The smith's wife saw our faces with the hungry eyes

⁸ Bureau Afvoer Burgerbevolking, or Bureau for the Evacuation of the Civilian Population.

and started immediately to break a great number of eggs in a frying pan in order to bake a big omelette. She cut some slices of bread, heated some milk and finally put the frying pan on the table. Already the preparation had brought water to our mouths, and we could not look anywhere else than at the woman and her activities. As hungry wolves we attacked the food. Another young man and I myself ate probably so greedily that after a short time we had to run into the yard and vomited, giving up all the precious food. With warm milk and some cinnamon the kind lady tried to calm down our rebellious stomachs.

In the group of evacuees were frequently persons who had been wounded by bullets or shell splinters. During the trips the medical personnel had to render care to them by changing bandages in a primitive way and without much material. Besides being hungry, the passengers, amongst whom each time there were a number of small children, were thoroughly cold in the draughty cars. After arrival at our destination, the BAB personnel had to inspect all cars in order to make sure that everybody had left the train. At arrival in Groningen after days of bitter cold, I saw during inspection an old lady sleeping in a corner. "Come on, Grandma", I said, "we are at our destination", and shook her shoulder. She fell forward, and only then did I realize that she was frozen stiff.

The trip to the north was never easy. Care for the evacuees, who, having been given only a short notice for their departure, never had opportunity to take much of their possessions with them. But frequently the return trip to the south was even more difficult and tense. All of us carried sacks and parcels with food for our own family and for relatives and friends of the people who had extended hospitality to us. The worst, however, was that no arrangements were made for our trip back to Schalkwijk, and that we had to see for ourselves how to travel home, using freight cars, trains for the transportation of German military troops, and a few times even trains carrying ammunition by lack of any other way of transport. To travel with these trains was extremely dangerous in view of the allied air raids, which became more frequent each day. Since there were only German trains or trains entirely for German purposes, (the normal Dutch train traffic had come to an end long before) each train was a target for pilots of allied aircraft⁹. The BAB personnel tried to seek shelter in a far

⁹ After more than 50 years, I still hear the loud German voices from the loudspeaker at the train station at Zwolle (one of the major railway stations in the north of The Netherlands) going on for half an hour: 'Luftalarm, hier ist Zwolle, Luftalarm (air raid alarm)'.

corner of the large railway building, but contact with German troops and once with a platoon of SS soldiers, who were as afraid as ourselves, could not always be avoided. I tried to stay in the background as much as possible, but the German soldiers, most of them of our age, were eager to talk so as to forget their fears. If spoken to, one had to give an answer, and I still wonder that never a German asked: "How come you speak German so well, and even with a Viennese accent?" One lived recklessly in those days.

Once we arrived at Zwolle late in the evening, lying in open freight cars on straw which covered heavy munition, and nearly frozen to death. We were told that no trains were expected until late in the next day. The prospect of spending the whole night and part of the new day sitting in the waiting room was just too much and we asked the stationmaster where we could possibly stay for the night. We were told that we needed a permit signed by the local German headquarters which was not far from the railway station. "Kok," said my comrades, "your German is excellent, go and find us a place to sleep." I tried to speak a kind of gibberish German at the Feldgendarmerie office, but did not succeed too well. It seems difficult to corrupt one's native tongue, at least I was not successful. So I changed quickly to normal German in order not to create any suspicion. I showed the soldier in charge several times my band with the Swastika, and received finally a "Quartierschein¹⁰" for a German barrack where we were allowed to lie down in a kind of gymnasium. We received some dirty old blankets, and had to lie down for the night on the bare floor. It was certainly not a pleasant night we spent as guests of the German military forces, however, the breakfast the following morning made up for the quite unpleasant night. Together with the soldiers we queued up with our empty mess tins, and I still remember the magnificent treat: a cup of hot coffee which really smelled like coffee, three thick slices of grey bread, butter, a piece of sausage and a piece of cheese. The sausage we took home as a kind of war booty, but Grandma Catania did not even dare to look at it. She considered the whole undertaking as crazy; and, she was probably not too far from the truth.

The worst part of the trip was the section over the Veluwe (part of Holland roughly between Utrecht and Arnhem) where the trains ran fast without a stop which meant that we arrived nearly frozen to death at Amersfoort. During one of our last trips we succeeded to squeeze ourselves with five to six men and women in the drag hut, which in former times

¹⁰ An allowance to stay.

was at the end of the last freight car. We stood therein packed like herrings in a barrel for hours, and fell like sticks of wood out of the hut on arrival in Amersfoort. It took us some time before we were able to move. We were so stiff and frozen that we forgot to take with us the numerous parcels and sacks with food which we had put in an open car above some iron bars. We returned, and with our stiff limbs we had climbed on the car when at that moment we heard a sharp command: "Stay where you are - military police." One of the uniformed Germans asked what we were doing. We showed our papers and our BAB arm bands, told the men where we came from, and that we had forgotten our luggage. This time even my perfect German was of no use. "All of you come with us," cried another uniformed man, who came running towards us, furiously.

We were brought to the Gestapo HQ in Utrecht with a police car. Was this the end of all my reckless adventures? We were brought to a small prison cell in the basement of the building, and were called upstairs one by one for interrogation. Papers, identity cards, BAB-documents, all were carefully examined. "So, so," said one of the Germans in civil clothes, "you were born in Djambi¹¹" I nodded, without saying a word. "So, so," he repeated, as if he wanted to say: "and you believe that I am going to buy that?" At this moment another man came in and looked at me intensively for some time. I sat on a chair motionless in mortal fear. The men moved to the other end of the room, from where I clearly heard one whisper: "Typical Javanese form of the head." This remark gave me new courage and hope. My main concern was my identity card which was not waterproof and which lay on the table together with all the cards of the group. For some unknown reason the two men left the room for a moment. Now or never, as quick as lightning I grabbed my identity card and put it in my pocket. Half an hour later we were released without any comment. At the BAB head office at Schalkwijk we later learned that our boss had heard about our detention and had left for the Gestapo HQ immediately in order to ask for our release. When one of the lower bureau staff members handed over our identity cards, he did not realize that I already stood with my card in my hand. This time all our luggage and food was confiscated, and we returned with empty hands. We did not mourn for long. Once again we, and certainly I myself, had crept through the eye of the needle.

¹¹ Djambi, my contrived birthplace, is a town in the interior of Sumatra, Indonesia.

Shortly after this incident there came an end to the evacuation transports, and with it the work of the BAB. Consequently, the supply of food stopped, and the situation became worse by the day. In addition to the family members Van Dijk there were now four persons hiding in the house, and every piece of bread had to be carefully shared, especially since also the supply of food coupons from the resistance movement became more and more irregular. Moreover, the supply of food on the market was becoming so scarce that even with coupons only very small quantities could be purchased. Together with the permanent tension, the intensive waiting for the end of the war which by now could not be too far away, came now an aggressive enemy: the hunger, which occupied all our thinking by day and even a great part of the night.

On "Mad Tuesday"¹² everybody ran out into the streets, including even persons in hiding. There was an atmosphere of victory, which everybody wanted to celebrate. Nobody could imagine what a difficult route we still had to go, and what difficult times lay still ahead. There is a lot of literature about the terrible hunger winter 1944-1945 in the Western part of Holland, and I am not able to add important new aspects. Moreover, how can one describe what "hunger" means? You are "full" of it, you think and dream of it nearly all of the time, and you cannot get rid of the gnawing feeling in your stomach. For months I slept now with Ysbrand in one bed in order to reduce the number of "warm" beds. There were now regularly razzia's (rounding-ups on people) at night, also owing to increasing treason by persons who, driven by hunger, did it for the reward in the form of food. When breaking into the houses the Germans checked the number of warm beds in order to find out how many persons were in the house. I doubt

On September 4th, 1944, the important harbour of Antwerp (Belgium) was taken by allied forces. BBC news said that these forces were moving rapidly to the North. Rumours said that a number of towns in The Netherlands, as for instance Breda, had already been liberated. This resulted in the so-called "Mad Tuesday" on September 5th, 1944. Owing to this news and especially to the rumours around it, euphoria was paramount also because many Germans and thousands of their hated Dutch henchmen, left on this day helter-skelter for Germany. Later it turned out that the euphoria was mainly based on rumours and that the progress of the allied forces was not as rapid as many had hoped. Only fourteen days later the unsuccessful airdropping operation Market Garden (the Battle of Arnhem) took place.

if a number of "cold" beds would have saved us in case of a razzia. In the evenings we sat with all our clothes and overcoats on in the ice cold dark room, most of the time discussing and fantasizing how to lay hands on some food.

In late November and the beginning of December, when darkness started early in the afternoon, we went to bed early realizing that the empty stomach and the fantasies about bakeries full of fresh, good smelling bread would bother us in bed even more than downstairs where in pitch darkness we tried to cheer up each other by all kind of stories. There was an unwritten law that whatever the story was, food should not be mentioned. Ysbrand and I went regularly to bed with a small piece of wood in our mouth on which we chewed in order to get asleep. We youngsters did not look too bad so far, but Grandma Catania and Aunt Lot looked each day more like scarecrows. At the end of December 1944 the situation became so alarming that we concluded, after hours of discussion, that something had to be done. Via friends we received the address of a farmer in the Wieringermeerpolder¹³, on condition to take also some food home for them if we were lucky to buy any food at all.

There was a distance of approximately 160 kilometers between the Havikstraat and the Wieringermeerpolder. How to cover this distance? Hunger promotes inventiveness and perseverance! Near our home lived a man who distributed coal with a carrier-bicycle, at least he did so in the time there still was coal. Now the bicycle stood unused in his shed. We told the man that we wanted to bring some food from the polder and needed a carrier for the transportation, for instance a carrier-bicycle. We promised to bring home also some food for him if he would be willing to let us have his bicycle on loan. Offering money during the hunger winter was generally regarded as an offense. There was only one payment: food. Hearing the word "food," the man immediately agreed to help us. The bicycle had to be done up, and the old tires had to be strengthened with linen pieces at the inside. The man, being an expert, tried to repair the tires as much as possible but as they were extremely bad and worn out, we were quite pessimistic. However, the thought of bringing home food overcame all our doubts. We worked for several days in the ice cold shed, and finally decided that nothing more could be done to make the bicycle better suited to our purposes.

On a very cold December morning, the second day of Christmas, Ysbrand, Els and I left in the direction of Amsterdam. First Ysbrand and I were proposed to go alone, but after some family deliberations it was decided that a girl could be an advantage if we were stopped by police or Germans, and also during our begging tour for food in the polder. Els sat in the carrier of the bicycle, numb with cold, while we treadled by turn. The two of us tried to treadle the heavy bicycle as long as possible in order to stay warm and to save the shoes from further wear when walking beside the bicycle. It was quite a procession in the snow-covered winter landscape. We were under way for food and therefore had received only a few pieces of bread for our trip. After one hour we had consumed all our supplies, and around noon, not too far from Amsterdam, we became really hungry. We stopped at several farms along the road, begging for some food, but near the big towns already so many hungry people had been begging for food that the farmers held their doors hermetically closed. Finally we succeeded, and we received from an old woman at one of the farms a few pieces of mouldy bread and a glass of water. So we arrived at least with a "full" stomach in Amsterdam. We drove through the nearly empty town, and crossed with a ferry the water behind the Central Station, heading North. In the late afternoon we arrived, deadly tired, at a small village called Ilpendam. What to do now? Everybody had to be indoors before 8 PM, and we had to find a place for the night.

We saw a house with a feeble light coming through one of the windows, which turned out to be the local fire-station. The fireman on duty was not very cooperative at first, but finally it was Els who succeeded to get permission to put up the bicycle in the garage where the two fire-engines were parked. This on the condition that we should stay there in the carrier as quietly as possible. "If they discover you, you slipped in through the open door without my knowledge." And after a few seconds he continued with a loudly spoken "Remember that!", instead of saying "Good night." I still recall this night, which seemed never to come to an end, very well. We were under a roof, but that was all there was. The walls glittered from our frozen breathing air, we were thoroughly cold, even though lying in the carrier as close together as possible, and above all we had a nagging hunger. Each half hour I looked at my watch using a match, but it seemed as if the pointers did not move.

As early as possible we left for the icy and foggy winter air, pushed forward with the idea that somewhere a warm kitchen with damping plates was awaiting us. After some

time we succeeded to get a few pieces of bread and a cup of hot substitute tea at a farm house. At each farm where we stopped for information we asked if we could buy some food. One farmer asked if we had something of value with us to trade for food, since money was of no use. Others said that there was no food any longer after the continuous stream of people from the big cities asking for food nearly all days long. On our way home I gave the farmer I just mentioned my watch, my last memento of my parents' home for a small sack of split peas.

In the late afternoon we arrived at the polder and after some enquiries we found in pitch darkness and long after the curfew time the address which our friends in Utrecht had given us. The reception at this place was cool. The farmer and his wife had much esteem for our great effort making such a trip and fully realized our need. As we had been dreaming about on our way, we received indeed in the warm kitchen a bowl of hot porridge with some slices of bread. When the farmer's wife saw our imploring looks after having wolfed down the food within a few minutes, each of us received another spoonful of porridge. The farmer's wife provided us with some blankets, and we received permission to stay for the night on the floor of the warm kitchen, but for 1 night only and not longer.

The following day the farmer gave us two sacks of potatoes and two half sacks of French beans, one for our friends and one for us. Moreover, we received half a pound of butter for our friends, and probably in order to make sure that we would hand it over, we too received half a pound of butter. For en route the farmer's wife gave us a whole bread which we tried not to touch in order to show at home our full booty. With the recommendation of the farmer, one of his neighbours sold us a small sack of beans. At least we did not return home with empty hands. But, there was still a long way to go before reaching home. The trip to the polder had asked much of our strength, but now we had before us a long way in bitter cold with a loaded carrier bicycle. Twice, we were able to repair one of the tires, but how long were they to hold out?

The first day on our way home we reached, with great effort, the town of Purmerend, approximately 30 kilometers north of Amsterdam. There was a pack of snow which had fallen during the night, and together with the sacks of food, two of us had to sit on the carrier because our shoes were so worn out that walking in the snow meant wet feet within a few minutes. So the speed of our progress was less than half of that on our way to the polder some days earlier. Our route

ran along a broad waterway with a few cargo boats moored along the banks. Where to stay overnight? Would it perhaps be possible in the hold of one of the boats? I don't remember who of us came forward with this idea. I climbed on one of the boats and knocked carefully on the window of the cabin, behind which a feeble light could be seen. After some time an old man, a skipper's hat covering his ears, came out. I told him where we came from, that we were on our way to Utrecht, and that we badly needed a place for the night. While telling my story, I pointed to the bicycle carrier on which Els and Ysbrand were sitting, numb with cold and hunger. "Quite a way to Utrecht," said the man, and he looked at me full of pity. "I am also heading for Utrecht," he continued. "With the boat?", I asked quite stupidly. "Yeah," he said grinning, "not with a bicycle carrier." "Would it be possible for us to go with you?", I tried very, very carefully. After some discussion with his wife and son, and later on with us in the warm cabin, half an hour later the bicycle carrier and its precious load stood in one of the empty holds of the boat. We had to stay with the bicycle in the hold, and were cautioned not to produce any noise. We were mad with joy, although we did not know how long the trip would take and how the whole undertaking would end.

We were under way for days, and only through the chinks of the hatches we could see whether it was day or night. The loaf of bread perished although we would have loved to bring it with us when reaching home. From time to time the skipper lowered half a pail of water. Another empty pail served as toilet.

One evening the skipper came down excitedly. "We have to pass a lock within an hour and I heard today that recently there have been checks at that point regularly. Don't make even the slightest noise." One could clearly see that he would have been very happy at this moment to be rid of us. After half an hour the engine fell dead, finally the boat did not move any longer. We heard a lot of noise and some loud comments in Dutch as well as in German, and the shoving of hatches. Later on the skipper told us what a narrow escape it had been. German military police wanted to inspect the boat, but he told them that there were only empty holds, while he was shoving the hatches all the time in such a way that we could not be seen.

We did not know how many days and nights we had been under way, but suddenly one of the hatches was opened and the skipper called down: "Utrecht - get out!" Never before or thereafter we had heard the name of the town with so much joy and gratitude. We embraced each other with tears in our eyes.

Outside it was pitch dark, and only with great effort were we able to bring the bicycle and its load up to the shore. It was a Sunday morning that we marched with our booty through the totally empty streets to the Havikstraat. Again much snow had fallen during the night and we left a track of the bicycle tires on our way. Near the municipal theatre we met a German patrol. They looked curiously and surprised at us, but drove on. Again, one of the so numerous interventions of our guardian angel had occurred.

In the evening our return was celebrated with a "banquet," consisting of mashed potatoes with butter and cooked beans. Rob had been able to collect some wood during our absence, and so we could cook the food and sit in a warm room for a few hours.

The last months before the liberation were by far the most difficult, not only for Jews in hiding but also for the whole population of Western Holland. Hunger, cold, treason, round-ups on people in hiding, were the daily events. No males below 45 dared to leave their homes since the Germans and their Dutch henchmen arrested them immediately for either forced labour in Germany or all kinds of fortification projects in Holland. All this happened with the knowledge that allied troops were in a wide arc around us, that the Russians were approaching rapidly the heart of Germany and that the German army was definitively on its knees. Daily there were all kind of rumours that the Germans would not hand over the so-called "fortress Holland," and that large areas around Utrecht would be inundated. The possibility to be locked up in Utrecht, but even more the dramatic food shortage in the Havikstraat, had Fritz and me, together with a representative of the resistance movement, brought to the conclusion that we should move to an address at Zeist. There was no farewell ceremony, we just left for a few weeks till the so anxiously expected end of the war. But at the same time we all felt that it was the end of a period none of us would ever forget.

Chapter 10
Freedom at last . . .

I do not remember how we reached the Oranje Nassaulaan at Zeist¹. Since our trip to the polder I had not been outside the house. I only recall that we walked the whole distance to Zeiss, trying to find all kinds of sneaking paths. At our new address we were greeted by a Miss Wolf who lived on her own in a large villa surrounded in the front and at the back by gardens. Besides Miss Wolf, there was a Jewish woman with two daughters who had lived there in hiding for years. Miss Wolf was a courageous woman who had participated in the resistance work during the whole occupation period. The food situation here was somewhat better than in Utrecht owing to the fact that Miss Wolf had all kind of connections through her work for the resistance, but it still was an extremely low calory intake per day. We were given a room at the second floor, and again I lived totally in hiding, and I was counting the days and listening to the news nearly all the time. The radio was hidden at the attic covered by old blankets and empty boxes, since listening to stations abroad was strictly forbidden by the German authorities. In fact, there had been an order already years earlier for the surrender of all radios. The news became better by the day and our hopes were growing greatly. At the beginning of April our food situation improved drastically, and totally unforeseen. Part of the villa was suddenly claimed for the quartering of retreating German troops. From one day to the other we faced a peculiar situation - downstairs the Germans, and upstairs Miss Wolf with five Jews in hiding. We tried to observe this "division, but during the weeks to come we could not avoid facing German soldiers from time to time. Fortunately, the soldiers had at that time other priorities and worries, they did not bother us. The soldiers received their provisions from a central German store, and Miss Wolf succeeded to receive some food in exchange for her involuntarily extended "hospitality. So it happened that the curious cohabitation

¹ "Oranje Nassau" is the name of the Dutch royal dynasty. Most towns and villages have a street or lane named after the Dynasty. This lane in Zeist is a beautiful road at the Eastern outskirts of the village, approximately 10 kilometers east of Utrecht.

of German soldiers, Jews in hiding, and a resistance worker within one residence was realized during the last weeks of the war, in peace and nearly without hunger. The whole situation was unreal, and only the knowledge that the end of the nightmare was nearby gave all of us the power to face this strange situation. We at the attic, listening secretly to the British news, downstairs the beer drinking Germans, and in between Miss Wolf carrying out all kind of activities for the resistance forces.

The end of April arrived bringing the death of Hitler, succession by Dönitz, the Russians in Berlin, the operation "Manna," i.e. the dropping of food by allied aircraft in the western part of Holland; everything went now so rapidly that we were nearly breathless. The Germans left the villa, and we immediately took care of the food supplies which they were not able to take along. The capitulation of all German forces was announced, and allied troops could be expected from the east in the next few days.

Then it was Sunday, May 6th. And my twenty-fifth birthday. There were more and more rumours that allied troops had been seen. We could not stay in the house any longer, and ran down to the highway which runs from the village of Driebergen to Utrecht. It was deathly quiet, there was nobody on the streets, no traffic, nothing. We stood between the trees, shaking from excitement, waiting.

Suddenly a Jeep approached, very slowly. We ran to the middle of the street, waving furiously with our handkerchiefs. The Jeep stopped, and two soldiers in battle dress and portable radios on their back, got out while two others were still looking around, constantly. We took their hands, we patted their shoulders, but we were absolutely unable to utter a single word. The soldiers understood our emotions. One of them reached for a bag in the Jeep, and offered us a large bar of chocolate. "Be careful, be very careful, there are still snipers around," said one of the soldiers. We did not hear their message, we only realized that they spoke English. It was true, and liberation was within reach. We would have liked to ask them all kind of questions, to hold them, to shake them, even to kiss them, but they were in a great hurry and moved on with their Jeep in the direction of Zeist. We ran home with our precious trophy, the chocolate bar with which we could prove that liberation had arrived.

We were so excited that we did stay awake all night, listening to the news on the radio. By the first light of the day we walked quickly to the centre of Zeist. There was now a continuous stream of vehicles on the road, tanks,

armoured cars with caterpillar tracks, military trucks and Red Cross cars. From the tower of the Town Hall flew the Dutch national flag. Hundreds and hundreds of civilians stood waving along the main road, while the soldiers threw biscuits, chocolates and cigarettes from their vehicles. On the tank sat a few youngsters, boys and girls. Another big tank slowly approached the crossing. Without thinking about it we with a few others jumped up onto the front of the tank. On this unforgettable day, May 7th 1945, we moved with the British 49th Infantry Division, the Polar Bears, into Utrecht. It was an experience never to forget! Passing De Bilt, we saw in the distance the tower of the Utrecht cathedral, a view greeted enthusiastically by the battle-tired British soldiers. On both sides of the road were people all the time, waving and calling good wishes into the direction of our liberators. Behind the road there were wide green pastures and a few chestnut trees with their white and red candles in full bloom. A beautiful day, as beautiful as it was on May 10th, 1940, the day the Germans invaded Holland. But what a difference of feelings between these two days in the month of May!

Entering Utrecht, the crowds became bigger. Even beds with sick people had been carried to the roadside in order to enable the patients to see the entrance of the British troops. A number of old people, unable to stand on their feet, sat on the edge of the side walks. Men and women were too feeble for much shouting, but there was a lot of waving and above all, tears of joy. In a Jeep immediately behind our tank, a number of officers stood upright, two of them with Red Cross armbands. Tears ran down their cheeks, and they frequently shook their heads. Only later we learned that these men, who had fought their way up from the south of Italy, were profoundly shocked by what they saw; all around them were men and women and children nearly starved to death, many with the edema of hunger.

In the narrow streets of the centre of Utrecht, the tanks had to slow down. We jumped from our tank, after having kindly thanked the crew, and walked into the direction of the cathedral. It was difficult to move through the crowds which near the Town Hall became larger and larger.

There were rumours that exactly at noon there would be the official surrender of the German military commander of Utrecht. Five years we had waited for this moment; I myself seven years, and nobody wanted to miss the moment. Unexpectedly, the crowd was very silent, waiting excitedly while the bells of the cathedral tower started to ring. At

the porch of the Town Hall stood a German officer who handed over his saber to a British major. Only at that moment there erupted ear splitting cheers. Persons totally strange to each other embraced and kissed. Not far from the Town Hall stood a small grey Jeep with a long antenna. We tried to approach the Jeep, and progressed only very slowly. It turned out that a BBC news reporter was giving an eye witness commentary on what was going on, and he interviewed passers-by from time to time. I felt a hand on my shoulder, and saw a black ball under my nose. "Who are you, sir?" I looked embarrassed at the young man, and stammered: "I am a Jew , sir, I have survived and now we are free."

And with a voice choked by tears, I shouted into the black ball: "We are free, we are free, we are free"

Epilogue

After World War II, Erwin H. (Dan) Kampelmacher studied veterinary medicine, still with the intention to pursue and serve his Zionistic ideals. In 1951, he finished his studies and became a Ph.D. in 1954.

In 1946 he married Fritz Pruffer, a marriage which was blessed with two children: Channa and Matanja (Map). In 1953 this marriage was dissolved. In the same year he married Carola Hoflich. During this alliance two sons were born, Michael and Raphael. The latter died, at the age of nine years, due to leukemia.

In 1954, the author joined the staff of the Rijksinstituut voor de Volksgezondheid (R.I.V.), National Institute for Public Health of The Netherlands, an Institute where he remained during his entire professional life. In 1960, he became Director of the Laboratory for Zoonoses and Pathological Anatomy, in 1970 Scientific Director of the Institute, and in 1982, Deputy Director General. In 1971, he became an Extraordinary Professor of Food Microbiology and Hygiene at the University of Wageningen. After retirement in 1986, he was elected President of the Dutch Royal Veterinary Association, a position held for six years. During his scientific career he served as an Expert and Advisor to the World Health Organization, the Food and Agriculture Organization, and the International Atomic Energy Agency, all of the United Nations. In 1987, he received an Honorary Doctor's Degree from the University of Zurich (Switzerland) for his contributions to the specialty of veterinary public health. He has also been honored as Honorary Diplomat of the American College of Veterinary Preventive Medicine, and numerous other honors.

He and his wife today live in retirement in Bilthoven, The Netherlands. Despite various efforts he did not succeed in realizing his ideal, namely settlement in the State of Israel.

The editor, Donald C. Blenden, has retired as Professor Emeritus, Colleges of Veterinary Medicine and Medicine, and Director Emeritus of the World Health Organization Collaborating Center for Enteric Zoonoses, University of Missouri, Columbia, Missouri. The author and the editor have been close personal friends for close to 40 years.

Acknowledgements

Translation from the original German (Chapter 1) was accomplished by Christa Faeser. The author and editor are deeply grateful for her invaluable assistance. Translation from the original Dutch (Chapters 2-10) was accomplished by the author.

